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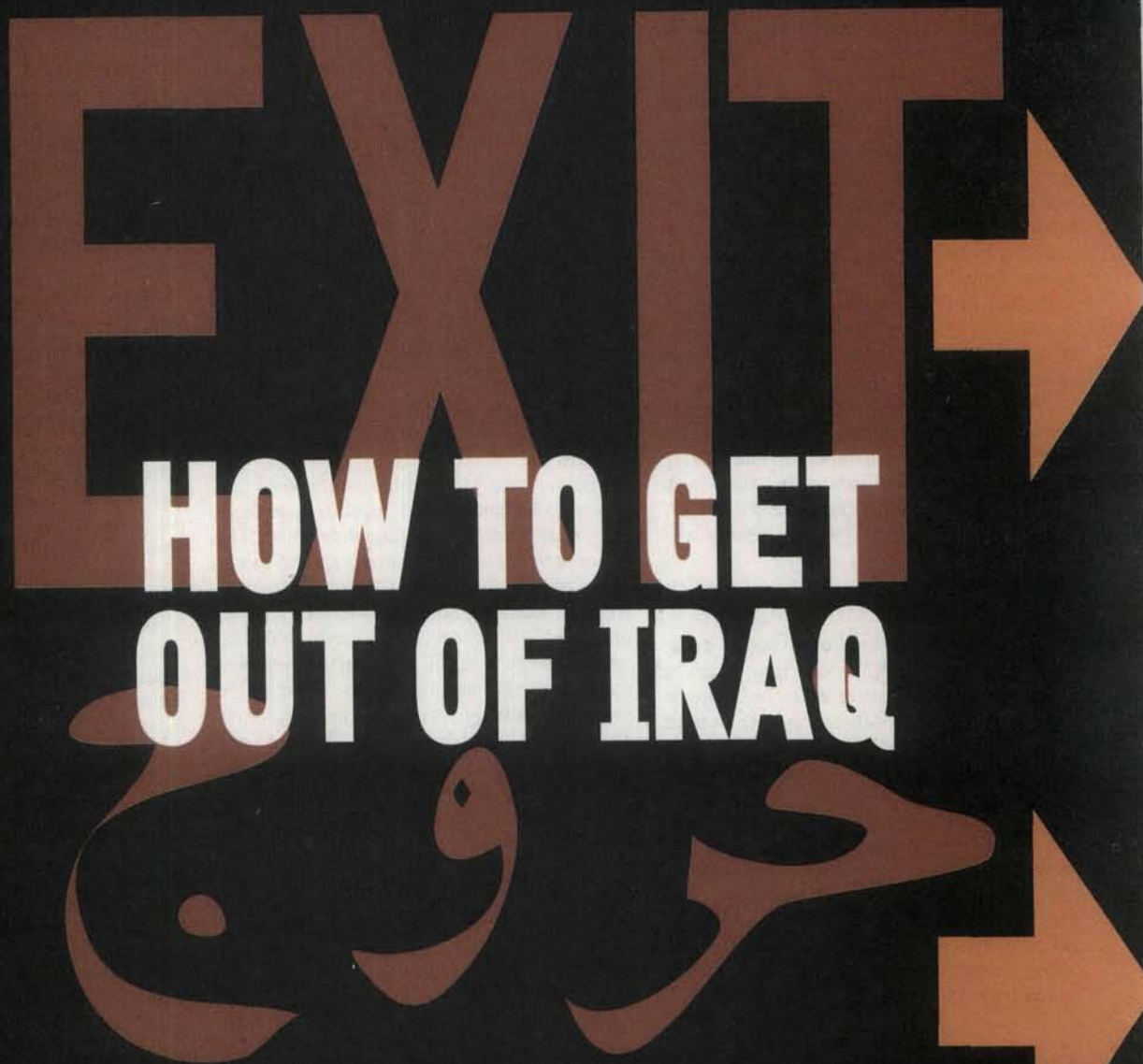
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LETTERS



R.O. BLECHMAN

PROZAC NOTION

New York City

■ Your devil-beater, in his diatribe against antidepressants, is throwing out the patient with the Prozac syrup [Alexander Cockburn, "Beat the Devil," April 19]. He is right about a moribund FDA and greedy drug companies. I ended my membership in the American Psychiatric Association because of their oh-too-close love affair with the pharmaceutical industry. And I am disgusted with doctors whoring for industry and with industry treating doctors to fancy dinners and trips to lovely resorts, where they "learn" about the latest, greatest antidepressant.

But Cockburn does a disservice by putting quotes around *depression* and chalking it all up to the lack of a good martini. Tell that to Spalding Gray's family or the millions of people who don't kill other people and have their lives saved by these medications.

Write about the vast medical-governmental-pharmaceutical conspiracy: I'm with you all the way. But don't diminish important muckraking by being so dismissive and cavalier about what can be a serious and life-threatening disorder.

STEPHEN P. HERMAN, MD

COCKBURN REPLIES

New Orleans

■ The sentence that irked some was my reference to "'depression,' a vast new territory opened up for exploitation after the economy peaked in the mid-1960s and people stopped drinking dry martinis." I thought it was a funny line, a lighthearted way of evoking all those cocktail drinkers of the '50s beating back the blues with buckets of gin. My motive for the line and for the quotation marks was to remind people of fashions in words and conditions, like quaint "hysteria" or fusty "neurosis," now a marked-down item in Siggy's Antiques. Real suffering marches on down the decades, and of course I entertain no indifference to the sufferers and their gratitude for the salves that help them.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

STICKY PICKETS

Los Angeles

■ David Moberg is an astute observer of labor ["A Union of Unions," April 19], but I take issue with his grouping of the UNITE-HERE merger with some other "new alliances." The dozen-plus unions that made up the Alliance for Economic Justice were merely a tactical assemblage, pulled together to get out the Gephardt vote. This is nothing like UNITE-HERE, two unions joining forces for a common vision and an overarching strategy to change dynamics of worker power (UNITE-HERE being one of the

first concrete manifestations of the New Unity Partnership—itsself the most exciting thing to happen internal to labor since John Sweeney's election in 1995).

Both of these models must be distinguished from the Steelworkers-PACE "strategic alliance," which smacks of a cobbled-together facade orchestrated by AFL-CIO leadership, to provide a countervailing force to the NUP. Too cynical? Which major labor president, in response to the NUPistas, issued a quote attacking the group? Steelworkers president Leo Gerard. And when the Steelworkers-PACE alliance was announced, the AFL-CIO touted it. When the UNITE-HERE merger was announced, the AFL-CIO uttered nary a peep. It may be scared of the change blowing in from the NUP, and rightly so. Rightly or wrongly, therefore, this AFL-CIO staffer would prefer that you withhold his real name here.

"JOSH H. PILLE"

MOBERG REPLIES

Chicago

■ There are many quite different efforts to find new ways for labor to work together more fruitfully, some more far-reaching than others. The Alliance for Economic Justice is a much looser arrangement, more focused on politics than the NUP, for example, but it has persisted past the primaries. While Steelworkers president Gerard says he applauds any NUP attempts to organize more effectively, he'd oppose any effort by the group to challenge Sweeney if he runs for reelection as AFL-CIO president. There's a need for even more experimentation, and collegial debate, on what direction labor should take, fewer institutional hang-ups and a much greater sense of urgency.

DAVID MOBERG

PHONY GAPS & PHONY WARS

Washington, DC

■ Frances FitzGerald ["The Goldwater Parallel," March 29] incorrectly links the charges of the "missile gap" in the early 1960s to false intelligence, when in fact the intelligence community, thanks to intelligence from U-2 flights, put an end to both the so-called bomber and missile gaps during the Eisenhower presidency. The phony gaps were kept alive by the Air Force to justify greater defense spending and by such cold warriors as Paul Nitze and H. Rowan Gaither Jr., who had headed the Air Force's RAND Corporation think tank. Moreover, it was Senator John F. Kennedy who milked public fears of such gaps for political gain, very similar to George W. Bush's current exploitation of 9/11 fears for similar gain.

MELVIN A. GOODMAN
former CIA analyst

Springfield, Mass.

■ In Frances FitzGerald's article we learn that "antiwar rhetoric has caused considerable dismay among some Democratic strategists" because the Democrats cannot win unless they "regain [their] status as the party of national security." It is important not to permit this viewpoint to take over in the Kerry campaign. The antiwar sentiment that helped end the war in Indochina and that finally found voice in the Howard Dean campaign must not be marginalized. It must be front and center in the coalition whose first goal is to defeat Bush and his dangerous neocon extremists. Without both groups in the coalition, John Kerry will not win in November.

That anti-Bush coalition involves the anti-interventionist (anti-imperialist!) wing of the Democratic Party in a shotgun marriage with old cold warriors like Zbigniew Brzezinski. It is heartening to see members of the foreign policy establishment attacking Bush's imperial strategies. However, we must recognize that Bush's behavior, aside from its verbal audacity, is nothing new. The "imperial impulse" in US foreign policy has a long, strong history. Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy all used force to protect the American Empire. Carter, whose administration FitzGerald claims was dominated by the left of the foreign policy establishment, was persuaded by Brzezinski to finance rebels against the pro-Communist Afghan regime in order to "draw" the Soviets in and give them "their Vietnam." When asked about this by *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Brzezinski shrugged off the resulting rise in Islamic fundamentalist militancy by saying that the defeat of the Soviet Union was much more important!

To their credit, some Democrats were persuaded that the imperialists had overreached themselves in Vietnam and thus joined in coalition with the antiwar movement to force an exit from Indochina. But they did this because of the pressure from outside the mainstream. It is essential that the "outsiders" (like many who joined the Dean campaign) continue to keep the pressure on Kerry and others to not back away from strong criticism of Bush's foreign policy.

John Kerry, veteran, made a significant contribution to the antiwar movement. John Kerry, senator, almost threw that away with his vote to support Bush's move to war. John Kerry, presidential candidate, must resist the siren song of the establishment to distance himself from the anti-imperialist wing of the Democratic Party. He must embrace it, or we're all doomed to four more years of Bush and the Project for a New American Century.

MICHAEL MEEROPOL
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EDITORIALS

The Horror of Abu Ghraib

"Abu Ghraib prison was used for torture in Saddam's time. People will ask now: 'What's the difference between Saddam and Bush?' Nothing!" So declared Saudi commentator Dawud al-Shiryan on the English-language website of Al Jazeera, a sign of how the now-infamous photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured and sexually humiliated by American soldiers are reverberating in the Arab world. The appalling images—seven naked Iraqis piled on top of one another as two grinning GIs look on; a kneeling detainee posing as if he is performing oral sex on another naked, hooded male inmate; the battered body of a dead prisoner packed in ice—have led to criminal charges against six US soldiers and administrative penalties for seven officers.

But the abuses are an indictment of more than just a "handful of people" who strayed from protocol, as Air Force Gen. Richard Myers tried to suggest on *Face the Nation*. As Seymour Hersh observes in the May 10 *New Yorker*, the sadistic behavior detailed in Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba's fifty-three-page classified report, including the sodomizing of a detainee with a chemical light, offers "an unsparing study of collective wrongdoing and the failure of Army leadership at the highest levels." Those implicated, among them employees of a private military contractor who apparently had no training in the handling of prisoners, claim they were following orders from their superiors, who urged that prisoners be "softened up" in order to extract information.

Ultimate responsibility lies in Washington. Despite George W. Bush's expression of "disgust"—"that's not the way we do things," he insisted—there is reason to believe abusive interrogation

methods have become an integral part of the Administration's "war on terrorism." It was two years ago that the *Washington Post* detailed a pattern of mistreatment at overseas CIA interrogation centers like the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan, where three detainees died; US military doctors termed it "homicide." Amnesty International has received scores of reports over the past year of detainees in Iraq "being routinely subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment." The US Army is conducting investigations into thirty cases of misconduct in both countries, at least ten of which involve suspicious deaths. Amnesty and Human Rights Watch are calling for a public investigation into allegations of torture by coalition forces, a demand that some in Congress have echoed. Representative Jan Schakowsky, meanwhile, has called on Bush to suspend all contracts with private firms for "security, supervision and interrogation of prisoners." It is hardly reassuring that the man charged with overseeing reforms in interrogation practices at US-run prisons in Iraq, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, was imported from Guantánamo Bay, the site of numerous human rights abuses and violations of international law.

Given that the war in Iraq is, in part, a war of images, the Abu Ghraib scandal represents a profound and perhaps irreversible defeat for the United States. Can any Iraqi now be expected to believe US intentions are good? A more insulting, inflammatory message to the world's Muslims and Arabs—and a more effective recruiting tool for groups like Al Qaeda—can scarcely be imagined. "The release of these pictures may be the point at which the United States lost Iraq," Juan Cole, a Middle East specialist at the University of Michigan, observed in the *Washington Post*. With this in mind, we offer a forum on page 11 on how the United States can extricate itself from Iraq as responsibly and expeditiously as possible—both for its own sake and that of the Iraqi people.

The Nation.

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Kucinich Fights On

Portland, Oregon

ELECTION
MATTERS

The peeling-gilt Aladdin Theatre, in a working-class neighborhood across the river from downtown Portland, generally draws rock acts a little too funky or faded to fill the city's main showcases. Tonight's headliner, Representative Dennis Kucinich, might qualify as either or both. But on this evening at the end of April, the Aladdin, with its 650 seats sparsely filled, is the last outpost of the Democratic presidential primary campaign.

Long after Senator John Kerry has clinched the nomination and all other Democratic contenders have dropped out, Kucinich is soldiering on—not to beat Kerry but to prod him. "Our campaign is giving him a road map to victory," Kucinich says cheerfully before his speech. "It's up to him to take it. Democrats need to demonstrate there is a capacity in our party to attract progressives. We can show there's room in the party." To Kucinich, that means four issues: universal single-payer healthcare, opposition to free-trade agreements, opposition to the Patriot Act and—above everything—getting out of Iraq. Kerry's position, he says, is that "there's a right way and a wrong way" to fight the war, and the idea nearly shakes Kucinich out of his jeans: "No!"

Judging by his almost imperceptible showing in previous primaries, Kucinich might seem an odd adviser on strategies for victory—although he notes proudly that he just won four delegates in North Carolina. But Iraq now seems both a bloodier and bleaker prospect than it did back in the snows of Iowa, bolstering Kucinich's point that target voters want to hear a sharper message on the subject from Kerry.

Kucinich never criticizes the Massachusetts senator directly, but actress Mimi Kennedy (*Dharma & Greg*) follows the Congressman on stage and asks, "The guy who came home from Vietnam and had the courage to oppose a war he knew was wrong—where's that guy?"

In the two months before Oregon's May 18 primary day, Kucinich is spending a month in the state. At the end of April, he even launched a small TV ad campaign. The spot begins, "Hi. I'm Dennis Kucinich and I've approved this ad because your vote for me will give the Democratic Party the courage to stand for bringing our troops home from Iraq."

Oregon was a careful selection for Kucinich's last stand. The state has an active antiwar movement and progressive community and has been a Ralph Nader bastion. Maybe more important, Oregon's primary voters have long shown a persistent fondness for candidates—from Nelson Rockefeller to Frank Church to Jerry Brown—who weren't about to win but who did show up here. A sign in Kucinich's Portland headquarters reads, "Everything we stand for may come together in a single state." Pursuing that goal, Kucinich has stumped Oregon as if he were running for governor. He emphasizes college campuses—where he draws crowds of several hundred—but has also appeared at record stores, an Indian reservation, the Ben & Jerry's in Eugene, and the Earth Day celebration at Portland's Kellogg Middle School. He's campaigned east of the Cascade Mountains, where a national candidate is as rare as a healthy wild salmon run. He's

COMMENT

taken positions on local issues from a new mass transit line to a public power proposal. Kucinich's House ID could now easily read: "D-Ohio and Oregon."

The Kerry campaign dismisses Kucinich's effort as irrelevant to the looming Kerry-Bush face-off. But at the end of April, it did announce that Kerry would campaign in Oregon sometime before the primary. Kucinich's impact is hard to predict. This year's Oregon primary has no serious Democratic statewide or Congressional contest—or any of the antitax or antigay measures that often speckle the state ballot—and a small, determined group might make a showing. On the other hand, many Oregon Democrats are so focused on beating Bush that they're reluctant to oppose Kerry even in a post-clinching primary. In 2000, Nader drew paying crowds of more than 7,000 in Portland. This spring, an effort to draw 1,000 voters to a nominating convention to put him on the Oregon ballot drew only 741. But Kucinich insists his effort isn't about weakening Kerry but strengthening him. "Senator Kerry doesn't need me to get to 47 percent," he says. "The people I'm talking to are the ones who can make the difference. If Ralph Nader poses a threat to Democratic victory in November, it's very easy: We just reach out and attract those voters."

Across the street from the Aladdin, Kucinich supporters, resembling rock concertgoers, hold up signs for hours before his appearance. One reads, ARE YOUR KIDS DRAFTABLE? On a booming sound system, they play, over and over, a tape loop of one of his speeches, and hundreds of passersby hear Kucinich declare, "This is going to be an election unlike any election this country has seen since maybe 1968." It's probably not what he means, but 1968 may have been the last time the Oregon primary really mattered.

DAVID SARASOHN

David Sarasohn is associate editor of *The Oregonian* in Portland.

Stonewalling on Wilson

The publication of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson's book, *The Politics of Truth: Inside the Lies That Led to War and Betrayed My Wife's CIA Identity*, affords a fresh opportunity to consider how George W. Bush has dodged accountability for a White House scandal.

It was back in July that conservative columnist Robert Novak identified Wilson's wife, Valerie, as a CIA operative specializing in weapons counterproliferation. Novak attributed this information to "two senior administration officials." At the time, Wilson, a prominent critic of the war, was causing trouble for the White House, having revealed that in February 2002 he traveled to Niger for the CIA and essentially debunked the allegation that Iraq had been shopping for uranium there. However, in his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush had relied on this charge to suggest that Iraq was close to developing nuclear weapons. Wilson's disclosure blew a hole in the Bush case for war and forced the White House to acknowledge that the President had used a spurious allegation, easy to disprove, based on forged documents.

The Novak column—which ruined Valerie Wilson's under-cover career and perhaps endangered her and her contacts—seemed like thuggish payback. Or an attempt to discredit Wilson's trip to Niger as a junket arranged by his wife. (It wasn't.) Or a message to others: Don't cross this Administration. Or all of the above. But in blowing her cover, the Bush henchmen may also have violated a federal law making it a felony for a government official to reveal the identity of a covert officer. Two days after the Novak piece appeared, I was the first reporter to note that the Wilson leak was evidence of a possible White House crime; but it was not until September, when the news broke that the CIA had asked the Justice Department to investigate the White House, that the leak story went big-time.

Since then, the Administration has hidden behind the ongoing criminal investigation, which, after the recusal of Attorney General John Ashcroft, is now in the hands of Patrick Fitzgerald, the US Attorney in Chicago. But the question remains: Why has Bush taken a lackadaisical attitude toward a leak that compromised national security and possibly violated the law? At the time of the leak, he and his White House did nothing to denounce or identify the guilty. In fact, evidence indicates that White House officials encouraged other reporters to spread the leak further. And once the leak became a criminal matter, Bush did no more than tell White House officials to cooperate with the inquiry. He could have called them in, asked them point-blank if they'd passed information to Novak, and then informed the public of what he'd found. (In his book, Wilson, offering no proof, fingers I. Lewis Libby, Dick Cheney's chief of staff, and Elliott Abrams, a National Security Council aide, as the leading suspects; the *New York Daily News*, quoting an "inside source," reports that the probe is focusing on Libby.)

Bush also could have asked Karl Rove if it was true, as Wilson maintains, that Rove told *Hardball* host Chris Matthews, "Wilson's wife is fair game." Shouldn't Bush be curious about whether this is the way his lieutenants do business? Unless, of course, he already knows. Wilson says he's troubled by the slow pace of the inquiry: "I'm appalled that [the investigators] haven't gotten to the bottom of it yet, and I have to conclude that the reason is that Administration officials in the know are simply stonewalling."

This is not only about whether a crime has been committed. It's about whether the White House used Soprano-style tactics, disregarded national security and tried to punish a critic and intimidate other critics. The federal investigation might not provide answers. Even a vigorous Justice Department probe could end up not unearthing enough evidence to justify a prosecution; the law here is rather narrow. And if no prosecution materializes, Fitzgerald will be under no obligation to report what his inquiry does uncover. (Some Democratic senators have considered calling for a special counsel-like report, but no drumbeat has yet been heard.) The criminal investigation aside, Bush bears ultimate responsibility for seeing that the Wilson leak is addressed and for sending a clear message that such dirty tricks will not be tolerated. Wilson's book is a sharp reminder that Bush has failed to do this and failed in his promise of leading a White House of honor and integrity.

DAVID CORN

Bhopal's Legacy

Every December for the past nineteen years, marchers in Bhopal, India, have paraded an effigy of Warren Anderson through town and burned it. Anderson is despised because he was the CEO of Union Carbide on December 3, 1984, when an explosion at the company's Bhopal factory leaked deadly methyl isocyanate gas over the city's shantytowns in the worst industrial disaster in history. The exact death toll will never be known—many corpses were disposed of in emergency mass burials or cremations without adequate documentation—but the Indian government now puts the total at more than 22,000 and climbing.

As the disaster's twentieth anniversary approaches, Bhopal is back in the news. On April 19 two advocates for the survivors won the most prestigious environmental award given in the United States. In her acceptance speech at the annual Goldman Environmental Prize ceremony in San Francisco, Rashida Bee confessed that she and colleague Champa Devi Shukla initially assumed they had been selected by mistake. "We knew a few individuals who had won awards," she explained, "[but] they were all educated people, spoke English and had e-mail accounts."

One a Muslim and the other a Hindu, Bee and Shukla are leading the fight to hold Union Carbide and its new owner, Dow Chemical, accountable for the Bhopal disaster, which the two women assert is still killing and injuring thousands of people a year through poisoned groundwater. "The gas disaster was sudden, one night, but the last twenty years have also been miserable," Shukla said in an interview. "People still have pain and breathlessness, and now we are seeing cancers, too. There is mental and physical retardation among children. Many women are sterile or never begin menstruating, so men don't want to marry them." A 1999 study commissioned by Greenpeace International

but conducted by independent scientists concluded that Bhopal's groundwater contains heavy metals, volatile chemicals and levels of mercury millions of times higher than is considered safe.

Neither Union Carbide nor Dow has ever faced trial for Bhopal—inconceivable, activists charge, had the disaster occurred in the United States or Europe. Union Carbide instead reached a \$470 million settlement with the Indian government in 1989, based on now-discredited estimates that only 3,000 people died and only 100,000 were "affected." Upon review of the settlement, an Indian court reinstated criminal charges against Union Carbide and Warren Anderson in 1991. When neither the corporation nor Anderson showed up for trial, they were declared fugitives from justice. The Indian government is now seeking their extradition, but Washington has not honored the request. Meanwhile, Dow, which purchased all outstanding shares of Union Carbide in 1999, refuses to accept the company's alleged Bhopal liabilities. "Dow remains firm in its position that in acquiring the shares of Union Carbide it acquired no new liability," John Musser, a Dow spokesman, wrote in an e-mail interview.

So Bee and Shukla are touring the United States, using the prestige of the Goldman prize to press their case. On May 13 they'll confront Dow officials at a shareholders meeting in Midland, Michigan. They demand that Union Carbide/Dow appear at trial in India, pay for survivors' healthcare and economic rehabilitation and help restore Bhopal's environment. They reject the suggestion that the \$470 million settlement discharged the company's obligations. "Union Carbide made that settlement with the government, not with the people affected," says Rashida Bee. "Not a single victim was consulted."

Battling the world's biggest chemical corporation is a far cry from the humble beginnings of the two activists. Bee was illiterate and knew nothing of the outside world when, at age 28, she experienced the disaster. It killed seven members of her extended family and left her husband too ill to continue his work as a tailor. Shukla lost her husband and two sons. A daughter later suffered three miscarriages, a grandson died and a granddaughter was born with a cleft lip and a missing palate.

Bee and Shukla consistently refer to what happened in Bhopal as a crime rather than an accident. "It was Warren Anderson's criminal negligence and insistence on cost-cutting that caused this disaster," says Bee. Internal Union Carbide documents, released in 2002 during the discovery phase of a civil lawsuit against the company, seem to support her contention. A 1973 document, signed by Anderson himself, notes that the technology to be used in the Bhopal factory was "unproven." A safety review conducted by Union Carbide experts in 1982 warned of a "serious potential for sizable releases of toxic materials" at the factory.

Dow spokesman John Musser confirmed the existence of the 1982 study but asserted, "None of the issues [it] raised would have had an impact on the fatal gas leak and all of the issues had been addressed by the plant well before the December 1984 disaster." The real culprit, the company insists, was sabotage. Musser further notes that it was the Indian government that declared itself the sole representative of Bhopal's victims before the 1989 settlement. Nor are allegations of groundwater contamination true, he said, citing studies in the late 1990s

CALVIN TRILLIN

ON THE SELECTION (AND DE-SELECTION) OF A BAATHIST GENERAL FROM THE REPUBLICAN GUARD TO PACIFY THE POPULACE, USING AMERICAN WEAPONS, OR, PICK OF THE WEEK

By smashing evil-doers flat, we've said,
This war has changed Iraq forevermore.
So why is it that Kurds and Shiites start
Imagining they've seen this all before?

by local and federal government agencies in India.

"They have their studies, we have ours, so let's go to court and let a judge decide who's right," said Gary Cohen, director of the Environmental Health Fund in Boston. Cohen has little hope that the Bush Administration will extradite Anderson or current Union Carbide/Dow officials. But, he says, "Dow wants to expand in India, and we're going to make that very difficult" by raising questions about the trustworthiness of a corporation that refuses to heed a court summons. Nityanand Jayaraman of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal says activists plan to press the Indian government to include Dow, not just Union Carbide, in the current criminal case; the government could then attach Dow's assets if it refuses to appear in court.

For their part, Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla hope to pursue justice face-to-face by tracking down Warren Anderson during their US tour. Shukla says that "if we see him, we will ask, If you are innocent, why are you hiding and not answering questions about what happened in Bhopal?" MARK HERTSGAARD

Mark Hertsgaard, Nation environment correspondent, is the author most recently of Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future and The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World.

Mean Green Job Machine

The presidential campaigns and their armies of consultants are well aware that a jittery American public yearns for jobs. Yet there is a dearth of new thinking on how to create solid jobs in the manufacturing sector, here and now. What's being overlooked is the potential for new job creation through environmental protection. We need an active, large-scale job-creation effort akin to a Green WPA.

Job creation and environmental protection are far from irreconcilable, as many assume; in fact, this idea is feasible and practical. Who would have thought "sheet-metal worker" was a green job, dependent on environmental regulation? But in 2002, pollution-abatement and -control programs created, directly and indirectly, roughly 12,000 jobs for sheet-metal workers, according to Management Information Services, a research firm specializing in data on the environmental industry.

Likewise, who would have thought that Indiana, king of the Rust Belt, had a thriving environmental industry? By 2000 it was generating \$4.9 billion in sales, \$382 million in profits and supporting roughly 110,000 jobs of all kinds, including manufacturing jobs producing high-efficiency heating, ventilation and cooling equipment; cleaner fiber processing; and equipment for pollution-control scrubbers. Therma-Tru, which manufactures in Butler, is one of the largest US manufacturers of insulated, energy-efficient residential doors.

But do we consider Indiana a "green economy" state? Hardly. While the general public understands the classic environmentalism of saving whales and wildlife habitat, it remains largely unaware of how dependent on environmental management our economy has quietly become. Few would believe that, depending

on what definitions are used, the environmental industry has begun to rival the military industry in economic importance, for both blue- and white-collar jobs, before the Reagan-era spike in defense spending and the recent post-9/11 buildup.

Few also realize the jobs potential inherent in ongoing environmental investment, which creates blue- and white-collar jobs, directly and indirectly. Such jobs are created by pollution-control efforts, energy and water conservation and myriad other environmental improvements that villages, cities, states and nations would do well to undertake. It makes more sense to embrace a Green WPA—an Environmental Jobs Infrastructure Investment Act—than to wring our hands about the migration of jobs outside the country.

John Kerry has articulated the jobs and environment link, but even his laudable "new energy economy" project speaks of energy independence by 2020, leaving the impression of a future jobs gain the public should accept on faith. A Green WPA would be more tangible, and improving energy efficiency would be a core component. Across the nation, precious energy is wafting through inefficient windows and doors in buildings that could be retrofitted, generating direct and indirect work. Water infrastructure is also woefully inefficient. According to the World Watch Institute's *State of the World: 2004* report, 10–30 percent of all water supplied in the country is lost to leakage. Correcting this environmental indifference would stimulate major job creation and, far from "make work," a national effort to improve water treatment and conservation would represent vital and farsighted civic investment.

Moreover, environmental jobs create twenty-first-century skills. For example, in Chicago, the first city in the world to operate zero-emissions hydrogen-fuel-cell buses in actual service, drivers and others gained vital experience in handling hydrogen fuel, a demanding talent that will serve these workers well as we move toward a hydrogen-based economy, a likely, and complex, long-term scenario.

In fact, just as pollution and resource degradation came out of the Industrial Revolution, redressing environmental degradation and investing in environmental innovation could underpin a new, green "Re-industrial Revolution" that could truly redraw the jobs horizon and emerge as both driver and support of the economy. For example, each state should create a special Jobs and Environment Task Force to identify needs and projects that would maximize the jobs-environment link, and local Chambers of Commerce, down to the county level, should evaluate their environmental industries and do everything possible to support and attract such businesses.

Coupled with a national Green WPA, these local efforts would transform the environment and employment landscape. Not only is the presumed trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth false, but the future of job creation in America, including in manufacturing, could well lie in environmental management.

PAULA DiPERNA

Paula DiPerna has written widely on environmental matters, including the relationship between jobs, income generation and the environment. A past vice president for international affairs for the Cousteau Society and president of the Joyce Foundation, she is founder of the Jobs and Environment Initiative, a pilot program of public policy research.

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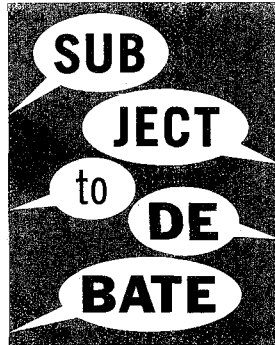
KATHA POLLITT

Show & Tell in Abu Ghraib

What are the thousand words, I wonder, that are worth the pictures of grinning US soldiers sexually humiliating Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison? An essay by Michael Ignatieff about human rights as the justification for war? An article by Samuel Huntington on the superiority of Western values? A rousing column by Tom Friedman calling on America to make Iraq a modern democratic state? Maybe Bernard Lewis could write up a talk about Islamic paranoia, or perhaps Alan Dershowitz could reprise in an op-ed his argument that torture can be morally permissible—a view that found a ready, even gleeful, hearing, I seem to remember, in journalistic circles after 9/11.

It's one thing, though, for writers to euphemize about "rough treatment" and propose scenarios in which there is one man in custody who can prevent World War III—and another to look at those pictures. Who are those soldiers, looking so much like frat boys and mean girls on steroids, how did they come up with their pornographic tableaux, and what were they thinking when they took their snapshots? True, Saddam's men tortured with impunity while our thugs will be brought to account (although maybe not those on contract—apparently even wartime atrocities are being outsourced now). Six supervisors have already been severely reprimanded and a seventh has received a "letter of admonishment." When you consider that Lieut. William Calley spent just three days in prison for presiding over the mass slaughter of men, women and children at My Lai in March 1968, a blot on one's résumé for overseeing prisoner abuse seems about on target. It was war. Things happen. And they take time to process: Maybe there were good reasons why the Army took no action for months after first learning of the abuse, why Gen. Richard Myers hadn't read the report although it was completed in February, why he asked *60 Minutes II* to postpone showing the photos, why Donald Rumsfeld took six days to comment and why George W. Bush's early reaction was a peeved and childish "I didn't like it one bit." (Compare that with his comment in the State of the Union address on torture and rape under Saddam Hussein: "If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning.")

The fact is, whatever the reason or excuse, however unrepresentative those photos are ever shown to be—and whatever punishment is eventually meted out to the perpetrators—the United States has just lost its last remaining rationale for the misbegotten invasion of Iraq. The WMDs are missing, the nuclear weapons never existed (even the "nuclear weapons program" has been dead since 1991); you don't hear much anymore about Saddam having been behind 9/11, although thanks to the media's slavish channeling of White House propaganda, 70 percent of Americans will probably go their graves believing him Osama's best friend. Now the rescue of the Iraqi people from tyranny and brutality is turning out to be another fantasy. The humanitarian argument persuaded a lot of people—good people—to give this war the benefit of the doubt. Does anyone still think Iraqis are about to shower their invaders with roses and sweetmeats?



The Administration will do everything it can to portray Abu Ghraib as, in Rumsfeld's words, "an exceptional, isolated" case. That seems unlikely: Human rights groups report many more instances of unlawful detention, torture and abuse, and there are at least ten pending investigations of prisoner deaths that we know of. Perhaps Western observers should have been less skeptical of reports that women inmates were raped and had pleaded to be saved, in smuggled leaflets. It is hard to believe human rights was one of the Coalition Provisional Authority's pri-

mary concerns, considering that it has permitted private companies to hire for security work Serbian mercenaries and confessed members of South African pro-apartheid death squads.

The pictures and stories have naturally caused a furor around the world. Not only are they grotesque in themselves, they reinforce the pre-existing impression of Americans as racist, cruel and frivolous. They are bound to alienate—further alienate—Iraqis who hoped that the invasion would lead to secular democracy and a normal life and who fear Islamic rule. Abroad, if not here at home, they underscore how stupid and wrong the invasion of Iraq was in the first place, how predictably the "war of choice" that was going to be a cakewalk has become a brutal and corrupt occupation, justified by a doctrine of American exceptionalism that nobody but Americans believes.

In the United States that doctrine still burns bright. What, Americans commit atrocities? Our boys? Our girls? For having the courage to speak out in 1971 against rampant wartime atrocities in Vietnam—his finest hour—John Kerry has been demonized as a traitor, a defamer of servicemen who is unfit to serve as Commander in Chief. Tim Russert helped launch this line of attack on *Meet the Press* in April, when he offered Kerry the opportunity to distance himself from testimony that has been "discredited." Now, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, a hastily formed group with close ties to the Bush Administration and big-time Republican donors, is leading the charge, and cable TV commentators are debating the "questions" these GOP hacks have raised about Kerry's patriotism. This, mere weeks after the *Toledo Blade* won a Pulitzer for its series on Tiger Force's vicious rampage across the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1967—a months-long fiesta of murder, torture, rape and mutilation. The Commander in Chief who avoided active service and has made such a mess of Iraq is honored as manly and decisive; the man who volunteered to serve and then protested a war few would defend today gets labeled a prevaricating shirker, unqualified to lead.

The big winners, as with so many steps taken by this Administration for our supposed protection—Guantánamo, the confinement of José Padilla and Yaser Esam Hamdi, the harassment and deportation of law-abiding Muslims—are Islamists and Al Qaeda. To their ideological bag of tricks, already bulging with religion, nationalism, misogyny, ethnic pride and antimodernism, they can now add the defense of civil liberties, human rights and the Geneva Conventions. Clash of civilizations, anyone? ■

ERIC ALTERMAN

Is Koppel a Commie?

The Sinclair Broadcast Group, a Maryland-based media company whose holdings include sixty-two TV stations, did the country a favor when it refused to air the April 30 special edition of *Nightline* in which Ted Koppel read the names and showed the faces of the 721 US soldiers who had died in Iraq to that point. By insisting that Koppel, the most respected commercial broadcaster in America, was seeking to undermine the war effort, Sinclair demonstrated the dangers to democratic discourse of allowing too much media power to be concentrated in too few hands, and it revealed as laughable the equation between reporters' alleged liberal bias and the content of the news. Sinclair is owned by and for right-wingers. Its top executives contribute generously to conservative Republicans, and it instructs its stations to slant the news in their favor. If Sinclair is willing to censor Koppel merely for honoring America's war dead and for reminding Americans of this sacrifice, it hardly matters what the bias of any individual reporter employed by the company might be. When it comes to media ownership, money doesn't merely talk, as the bard of Hibbing sang, "it swears."

Even by the debased "with us or agin' us" standards of Bush-era punditocracy discourse, Sinclair stands out as an impressively dumber-than operation. Like Rupert Murdoch's Fox Network, it shamelessly distorts the news and mocks those who would let reality interfere with its ideologically induced ignorance. Its centrally controlled content highlights the wit and wisdom of its corporate mouthpiece, Mark Hyman, who speaks of "cheese-eating surrender monkeys" in France, a "hate-America crowd" in the media and "unpatriotic politicians who hate our military" in Congress. And while Sinclair refuses to broadcast the names and faces of America's dead soldiers—a refusal that Senator John McCain, former Vietnam prisoner of war, termed "misguided" and "unpatriotic"—it is more than happy to provide its viewers with propaganda "news" stories manufactured by the Bush Administration to fool the public. Sinclair has also sent Hyman and another "reporter" to Iraq to find the "good news" its corporate owners insist journalists are deliberately withholding from the nation.

Barry Faber, Sinclair vice president and general counsel, told the *Washington Post* that they had chosen to censor *Nightline* because they believed the program's "motivation is to focus attention solely on people who have died in the war in order to push public opinion toward the United States getting out of Iraq." Faber suggested that the reading of the names of the dead would "unduly influence people." Using the same bait-and-switch routine the Administration deployed to justify its unprovoked attack on Iraq, a Sinclair press release demanded to know why Koppel did not read "the names of the thousands of private citizens killed in terrorist attacks since and including the events of September 11, 2001. In his answer, we believe you will find the real motivation behind his action scheduled for this Friday." Well, the answer is,

**STOP THE
PRESSES**



he did—on the first anniversary of 9/11—but don't bother Sinclair with facts. "The average viewer who watches the show is not going to remember that," Faber replied to *Post* reporter Lisa de Moraes, who pointed it out to him. To point out that no connection has been established between Iraq and 9/11 seems almost persnickety in this context, except that it was used to justify the war and is still trotted out by that unreconstructed fabulist, Vice President Cheney, among other war defenders.

Although the Administration did not publicly support Sinclair's anti-GI position, it clearly prefers that any evidence of the costs of war be hushed up. The Pentagon has censored all coverage of returning war dead, and when a photo of flag-draped coffins evaded the ban, the photographer lost her job with a Defense Department contractor. Meanwhile, Sinclair is not the only news organization to base its coverage on what it believes to be good for Bush's war. When *60 Minutes II* shocked the world with photos of US military personnel abusing and torturing Iraqis held in a Baghdad prison, the editor of the *New York Post*, Col Allan, told a *New York Times* reporter he would not run the photos because "a handful of US soldiers" shouldn't be allowed to "reflect poorly" on the 140,000 who do their job well. In fact, as the heroic Seymour Hersh reported in *The New Yorker* days later, the horrific torture may have been the official policy of US military intelligence.

The shocking sight of US soldiers forcing Iraqi prisoners to simulate oral sex and masturbate in front of their captors brings home the degree to which the Iraq adventure is unraveling, at a pace surprising even to its most vociferous critics. Much of the problem lies with the Administration's incompetence, but a healthy proportion can also be attributed to its deliberate dishonesty—coupled with a cowed media's unwillingness to subject its false contentions to even rudimentary scrutiny. During the run-up to the invasion, America, as *Washington Post* ombudsman Michael Getler observed with euphemistic delicacy, was "taken to war and almost everything we were told before the war, other than that Saddam Hussein is bad, has turned out, so far, not to be the case: the weapons of mass destruction, the imagery of nuclear mushroom clouds, the links between al Qaeda and Hussein, the welcome, the resistance, the costs, the numbers of troops needed. All of these factors were presented by the administration with what now seems, at best, to have been a false sense of certainty." And yet given all that, the likes of Sinclair, the *New York Post* and their partners in faux-patriotic misinformation and censorship—including corporate giants Clear Channel and the entire Murdoch empire—seek to keep Americans ignorant not only of the lies we've been fed but also of the cost of these lies in lost lives.

Reactionary media giants are undermining our democracy as they cheer this Administration toward ever greater disaster abroad. How, as John Stuart Mill asked, can citizens possibly "check or encourage what they are not permitted to see?" ■

ARTICLES

HOW TO GET OUT OF IRAQ:

A FORUM

As the situation in Iraq goes from bad to worse, many Americans who opposed the war, including Nation editors and writers, understand that the country must find a way to extricate itself from the disaster they predicted. There is, however, no agreement or even clarity about such an exit strategy. Nor is any leadership on this crucial issue coming from the Bush Administration or as yet, alas, from the presumptive Democratic candidate, Senator John Kerry. With a sense of obligation and urgency, The Nation has asked a range of writers, both regular and new contributors to the magazine, for their ideas on America's way out of Iraq. Some responded with short essays, while others were interviewed by contributing writer Scott Sherman, who transcribed and edited their remarks. We hope that what follows is the beginning toward a necessary end. And we invite readers to respond; we will publish an exchange in an upcoming issue.

—The Editors

Jonathan Schell

The Harold Willens Peace Fellow at The Nation Institute, he is the author, most recently, of The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People (Metropolitan).

In the debate over the Iraq war, a new-minted fragment of conventional wisdom has fixed itself in the minds of mainstream politicians and commentators. Whether or not it was right to go to war, we are told on all sides, the United States must now succeed in achieving its aims. In the words of John Kerry, "Americans differ about whether and how we should have gone to war, but it would be unthinkable now for us to retreat in disarray and leave behind a society deep in strife and dominated by radicals."

Or as Senator Richard Lugar has said, "We are in Iraq and so we're going to have to bring stability." Or, as Senator Joseph Biden, among so many others, has said, as if to put an end to all discussion, "Failure is not an option."

The argument is an irritating one for those of us who opposed the war, suggesting, as it does, that we must now sign up for the project ("stay the course") because the very mistake we warned against was made. But the problems are more serious than annoyance. Of course, no one wants to see anarchy or repression in Iraq or any other country. But what can it mean to say that failure is not an option? Has the decision to go to war exhausted our powers of thought and will? Must we surrender now to fate? "Failure" is in truth never an "option." The exercise of an option is a voluntary act; but failure is forced upon you by events. It is what happens when your options run out. To rule out failure is not a policy but a wish—and a wish, indeed, for omnipotence. Yet no one, not even the world's sole superpower, is omnipotent. To imagine otherwise is to set yourself up for a fall even bigger than the failure you imagine you are ruling out.

And so decisions must still be made. It's true that we opponents of the war cannot simply say (as we might like to do), "Please roll history back to March of 2003, and make your disastrous war unhappen." It's also true that when the United States overthrew the Iraqi government it took on new responsibilities. The strongest argument for staying in Iraq is that the United States, having taken over the country, owes its people a better future. But acknowledgment of such a responsibility is only the beginning, not the end, of an argument.

To meet a responsibility to someone, you must have something on offer that they want. Certainly, the people of Iraq want

electricity, running water and other material assistance. The United States should supply it. Perhaps—it's hard to find out—they also want democracy. But democracy cannot be shipped to Iraq on a tanker or a C-5A. It is a homegrown construct, which must flow from the will of the people involved. The expression of that will is, in fact, what democracy is.

But today the United States seeks to impose a government on Iraq in the teeth of an increasingly powerful popular opposition. The result of this policy can be seen in the shameful attacks from the air on the cordoned-off city of Falluja, causing hundreds of casualties. The more the United States tries to force what it insists on calling democracy on Iraq, the more the people of Iraq will hate the United States, and even, perhaps, the name of democracy. There is no definition of an obligation that includes attacking the supposed beneficiaries' cities with F-16s and AC-130 gunships.

President Bush commented recently of the Iraqis, "It's going to take a while for them to understand what freedom is all about." Hachim Hassani, a representative of the Iraqi Islamic Party, a leading Sunni Muslim group represented on the so-called Governing Council, might have been answering him when he commented to the *Los Angeles Times*, "The Iraqi people now equate democracy with bloodshed."

Under these circumstances, staying the course cannot benefit Iraq. On the contrary, each additional day that American troops continue to fight in Iraq can only compound the eventual price of the original mistake—costing more lives, American and Iraqi, disorganizing and pulverizing the society, and reducing, not fostering, any chances for a better future for the country.

There are still many things that the United States can do for the people of Iraq. Continued economic assistance is one. Another is to help international organizations assist (but only to whatever degree is wanted by the local people) in the transition to a new political order. But all combat operations should cease immediately and then, on a fixed and announced timetable, the American forces should withdraw from the country. In short, the United States, working with others, should give Iraqis their best chance to succeed in their own efforts to create their own future.

According to the most recent Times/CBS poll, the public, by a margin of 48 percent to 46 percent, has decided, with no encouragement from either of the two major-party presidential candidates or from most media commentators, that the war was a mistake. Forty-six percent have decided that the American troops should be withdrawn. They are right. The United States should never have invaded Iraq. Now it should leave.

Howard Zinn

Author, in 1967, of Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal, and, later, A People's History of the United States.

Any "practical" approach to the situation in Iraq, any prescription for what to do now, must start with the understanding that the present US military occupation is morally unacceptable. Amnesty International, a year after the invasion, reported: "Scores of unarmed people have been killed due to excessive or unnecessary use of lethal force by coalition forces during public demonstrations, at checkpoints and in house raids. Thousands

of people have been detained [estimates range from 8,500 to 15,000, often under harsh conditions] and subjected to prolonged and often unacknowledged detention. Many have been tortured or ill-treated and some have died in custody." The prospect, if the occupation continues, whether by the United States or by an international force (as John Kerry seems to be proposing), is of continued suffering and death for both Iraqis and Americans.

The history of military occupations of Third World countries is that they bring neither democracy nor security. The laments that "we mustn't cut and run," "we must stay the course," our "reputation" will be imperiled, etc., are exactly what we heard when at the start of the Vietnam escalation some of us called for immediate withdrawal. The result of staying the course was 58,000 Americans and several million Vietnamese dead.

The only rational argument for continuing on the present course is that things will be worse if we leave. In Vietnam, they promised a bloodbath if we left. That did not happen. It was said that if we did not drop the bomb on Hiroshima, we would have to invade Japan and huge casualties would follow. We know now and knew then that this was not true. The truth is, no one knows what will happen if the United States withdraws. We face a choice between the certainty of mayhem if we stay, and the uncertainty of what will follow if we leave.

What would be a reasonably good scenario to accompany our departure? The UN should arrange, as US forces leave, for an international group of peacekeepers and negotiators from the Arab countries to bring together Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, and work out a solution for self-governance that would give all three groups a share in political power. Simultaneously, the UN should arrange for shipments of food and medicine, from the United States and other countries, as well as engineers to help rebuild the country.

The one thing to be avoided is for the United States, which destroyed Iraq and caused perhaps a million deaths through two invasions and ten years of sanctions, to play any leading role in the future of that country. In that case, terrorism would surely flourish. It is for the United States to withdraw from Iraq. It is for the international community, particularly the Arab world, to try to reconstruct a nation at peace. That gives the Iraqi people a chance. Continued US occupation gives them no chance.

William R. Polk

Responsible for planning Middle Eastern policy at the State Department, 1961–65 and then a University of Chicago professor of history. His books include The United States and the Arab World and The Elusive Peace.

akhdar Brahimi's proposals are interesting, perhaps even hopeful, but they pose almost as many problems as they address. The Shiites are worried that he is attempting to undercut their claims on power, and after the siege of Falluja the Sunnis will probably worry that he is, inadvertently or not, acting as a cover for American attempts to hang on to control. They have reason to worry.

The world press has reported that very little real authority will be handed over to the Iraqis or the United Nations. If the UN is to be of any value in pacifying Iraq, it cannot simply be used by

the United States as a fig leaf. It must show Iraqis that it is truly independent, and so a worthwhile step forward for them. For all that, some form of UN trusteeship appears to be the best answer now available. It seems to me that the best form of trusteeship is minimal, not much more than attempting to keep order. Anything more will certainly raise fears in Iraq that outsiders—the United States or the UN—really intend to stay. That will create the only unity there now is in Iraq, hostility to foreigners.

John Brady Kiesling

A career diplomat who served in US embassies in Tel Aviv, Casablanca, Athens and Yerevan. In February 2003 he resigned from the Foreign Service in protest against Bush Administration foreign policy.

President Bush promised the Iraqi people and the international community that our military victory would make Iraq a peaceful, democratic state, a model for its neighbors and a bastion against terrorism. If this was our war aim, our victory did not achieve it. The resistance movement has pinned down our soldiers and contractors as enemy occupiers. If our troops pull out, there will be civil war among a dozen rival factions. If our troops stay, in redoubled numbers to suppress the violence, their hulking presence will doom each future Iraqi government to illegitimacy and failure. So let us consider the alternatives to victory.

In the end a fractured Iraq can be held together only by a man wrapped, like George Washington or Ho Chi Minh, in the legitimacy that derives from successful armed struggle. We should note the ease with which a scruffy young cleric united Sunnis and Shiites against the US presence. A victorious Secretary Rumsfeld could not impose Ahmad Chalabi. However, a retreating US military can designate Iraq's liberator. We must select the competent Iraqi patriot to whom we yield ground while bleeding his competitors. There will be casualties and disorder, no matter how brilliantly we orchestrate our withdrawal. But the overwhelming majority of Iraqis will rally around any man who claims to drive us out, and elections would validate his relatively bloodless victory.

The man on a white horse can bring the UN back as invited guests rather than as our despised surrogates. His police will enforce the law, when ours cannot. His debts will be forgiven, when ours would not. America must swallow its resentment and keep a measure of control by doling out the money to keep the Iraqi state functional. Ten billion dollars a year will buy more counterterrorism cooperation than a military occupation that costs five times as much. And we will let the Iraqis do the work. The most virtuous Halliburton employee is ten times more expensive than the most corrupt Iraqi. Democracy and human rights may take a generation, but our defeat will convince a resentful and fatalistic Middle East that change is possible.

The Kurds, admittedly, will resist any weakness in their US ally. Our parting gift to them will be the southern border for an autonomous Kurdish entity. The price will be US cooperation with Turkey to extort a semblance of respect for the Iraqi central government and the rights of Arab and Turkmen minorities.

We were defeated once, in Vietnam, and the dominoes did not fall. We remained the leader of the free world, sadder but wiser.

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The ignorance and megalomania that brought us into Iraq are far more dangerous to US security and prosperity than would be the symbolic military defeat that gets us out.

Anne-Marie Slaughter

Dean, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University.

The United States faces two critical issues in Iraq. First is the necessity of genuinely engaging the international community in stabilizing the security situation, supporting the new Iraqi government after June 30 and rebuilding the country's infrastructure and economy. Crucially, this does not mean simply brokering a face-saving resolution and handing off to the UN, only to blame the UN later when Iraq slides into chaos or worse. On the contrary, it means clearly defining a UN mandate, to be supported by NATO and other regional organizations, and then committing the human and material resources necessary to carry out that mandate. Handing off to the UN without such support is an abdication of responsibility and an admission of failure.

Second is accepting that a genuine democracy in Iraq will bring a genuine majority to power. The way to protect minorities in a democratic Iraq is through federalist provisions and explicit guarantees of minority rights. In principle, even a Shiite theocracy can abide by such guarantees. The United States has proclaimed the principles of democracy and self-determination and must now abide by whatever results are consistent with the protection of basic international human rights.

Noam Chomsky

His most recent books are A New Generation Draws the Line; New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind; 9-11; Understanding Power; On Nature and Language; The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?; Chomsky on Democracy and Education; Middle East Illusions; and Hegemony or Survival.

Occupying armies have responsibilities, not rights. Their primary responsibility is to withdraw as quickly and expeditiously as possible, in a manner determined by the occupied population. It follows that the orders issued by proconsul Bremer are illegitimate and should be rescinded, including those designed to place the economy effectively in the hands of Western (mostly US) banks and MNCs, and the 15 percent flat tax, which, apart from its injustice, bars the way to desperately needed social spending and reconstruction. Without economic sovereignty, prospects for healthy development are slight and political independence verges on formality.

It also follows that Washington should end the machinations to insure its long-term military presence and control of Iraqi security forces, in defiance of the will of Iraqis, who call for Iraqis to control security, according to Western-run polls, which record only minuscule support for the occupying military forces and their civil counterparts (the CPA) or the US-appointed Governing Council. With a decision, however reluctant, to transfer authentic sovereignty to Iraqis—not just the traditional facade for Great Power domination—there will be no justification for

the huge diplomatic mission, apparently the world's largest, announced by the occupiers.

Such steps entail abandonment of plans to establish the first secure military bases in a client state at the heart of the world's major energy reserves, a powerful lever of world control, as has been understood for sixty years, and a means to subordinate the region more fully to US interests—and the prime motive for the invasion, according to Western polls in Baghdad, though some agreed with articulate Western opinion that the goal was to establish democracy (1 percent) or to help Iraqis (5 percent).

A large majority of Americans believe that the UN, not the United States, should take the lead in working with Iraqis to transfer authentic sovereignty as well as in economic reconstruction and maintaining civic order. That is a sensible stand if Iraqis agree, as seems likely, though the General Assembly, less directly controlled by the invaders, is preferable to the Security Council as the responsible transitional authority. Reconstruction should be in the hands of Iraqis, not delayed as a means of controlling them, as Washington has indicated. Reparations—not just aid—should be provided by those responsible for devastating Iraqi civilian society by cruel sanctions and military actions; and—together with other criminal states—for supporting Saddam Hussein through his worst atrocities and beyond.

That is the minimum that honesty requires.

Stephen F. Cohen

A professor of Russian studies and history at New York University. His latest book is Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia.

For the sake of American lives, values and real security, as well as peace and stability in the increasingly explosive Middle East, the United States must find a way to withdraw its military forces from Iraq as soon as possible. And do so with some vestige of, yes, honor—not for the bogus reason of international “credibility” but to prevent a malignant who-lost-Iraq politics in our own country.

The only near-term and honorable way out is by linking a firm US commitment to a phased military withdrawal to an Iraqi popular election for a representative national assembly that would itself, not the occupation authorities or its appointees, choose an interim government, adopt a constitution for the country and then schedule elections for the new permanent institutions of government.

For Iraqis, only such a directly elected assembly can have legitimacy and thus the “sovereignty” that the Bush Administration is desperately trying to manufacture and “transfer.” Do not mistake this approach for the Administration's afterthought of “building democracy in Iraq,” which would mean resolving all that tormented country's internal conflicts, and for which America utterly lacks both the power and wisdom even to attempt. It means instead giving the Iraqis an opportunity to do it themselves. (Whether or not they can is their destiny, not ours.) Considering the devastating consequences of an unnecessary American war, providing such a democratic opportunity is both the least and most we can now do. And having done so, the United States can declare, paraphrasing sage but ignored advice given during the

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Vietnam War, "Mission accomplished. We're going home."

For this democratic exit to work, the United States must, as the otherwise vacuous refrain goes, "stay the course," but a course based on four promises that must be kept. American-led occupation authorities will permit free and fair elections to the national assembly, within the next six to nine months, under the auspices of the UN or another international body. They will accept the electoral outcome even if it is an anti-American majority. Meanwhile, the United States will prepare Iraqi security forces but begin its military withdrawal once the interim government is functioning. And Washington will continue to provide funds for the reconstruction of Iraq as long as the new Iraqi authorities generally abide by their democratic origins.

We must flatly dismiss American proponents of a permanent US garrison in Iraq—for the sake of oil, Israel, some "anti-totalitarian" crusade, or empire—but there still may be three objections to this relatively quick and honorable exit strategy. One is that the American occupation should not end until there is stability in Iraq, because the consequences will be chaos and violence. But this admonition ignores the historical lessons of occupations elsewhere and of the current situation in Iraq: There can be no stability until foreign occupation ends, as is clear from the chaos and violence unfolding today. The second objection is that anti-American "extremists" will disrupt the election for the national assembly. But if such Iraqis really want America gone, they will support an electoral process that leads to a US withdrawal.

The third objection may be heartfelt: We did not go to war, and lose lives, to risk the advent of another anti-American regime in Baghdad. Yes, the Bush Administration went to war to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and when there were none, it said the war was really about democracy. Now this afterthought, whatever the political (or economic) outcome, is the only way out and our last chance to be remembered as liberators. The alternative is indefinite colonial-style rule, growing and increasingly violent Iraqi resistance, and an ever-more brutal and self-corrupting American occupation—and eventually an even more anti-American regime that will come to power by means other than the ballot box.

Ray Close

Former CIA station chief in Saudi Arabia, he served for twenty-seven years as an "Arabist" for the agency.

The first thing we have to adjust to is the reality that nationalism is the most significant force in Iraq today. It is replacing the genuine feelings of gratitude that many Iraqis had toward the United States immediately following their liberation. We have always had a set of objectives—based on neocon ideology, not Iraqi hopes—which are unattainable because they offend the spirit of Iraqi nationalism.

One, we want long-term strategic military bases. Two, we count on retaining significant influence over Iraqi oil policy. Three, we favor unrestricted foreign investment in a country that has a history of intense hostility toward alien ownership of the country's economic enterprises and natural resources. Four, we expect Iraq to support America's role in the Middle East peace

process even when it would mean aligning Iraqi policy with that of George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon. Failure to achieve those four objectives will appear to both Republicans and Democrats to be a failure of Bush's overall Iraq policy. But the Administration has already boxed itself in to the point where there is no way it can modify those objectives to meet reality.

There has to be regime change in Washington. It's the only way to solve the Iraq problem.

Phyllis Bennis

Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and author of Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN.

One year after President Bush's announcement of the end of "major combat operations" in Iraq, Washington's drive to empire faces new and serious challenges. One year to the day after US military forces famously pulled down the statue of Saddam Hussein, the front page of the *Washington Post* featured a photograph of a US soldier pulling down another potent symbol—this one a poster of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr—from a pillar in the same Baghdad square.

The US-led occupation of Iraq is failing, and ending the Bush Administration's disaster can only begin with ending that occupation—not with a nominal "transfer of power" that leaves 130,000 US troops still occupying Iraq, but with an actual end to the occupation. Unlike in Vietnam, the constant barrage of "we're building democracy in Iraq" rhetoric may have made it impossible for Bush to "declare victory and get out." Instead, ending the occupation will likely mean admitting that the war was wrong, that "staying the course" is only making things worse and that hundreds of young American and coalition soldiers as well as thousands of Iraqi civilians are paying an unacceptable price.

The end of the US occupation will not alone, however, mean the end to Iraq's crisis. Devastated after years of crippling economic sanctions, internal repression and US assaults that destroyed its governing capacity, Iraq will require significant international help. But only after full US withdrawal can serious thought be given to how the global community might—indeed must—support Iraq's post-occupation efforts to reclaim its sovereignty.

The withdrawal and the dissolution of the US-imposed "Governing Council" will make possible the entry into Iraq of an international team, led by the United Nations and backed by the key regional alliances—the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference—to provide protection and support. Accountable to whatever Iraqi authority emerges after the occupation ends, that team should be made up primarily of technocratic experts—in elections, in development, in economic planning, etc.—and only secondarily include a military self-defense and security component.

Most Iraqi military resistance is aimed directly at the occupation; an international assistance mission that does not control Iraqi territory, does not impose laws on Iraq, does not hand Iraqi assets over to corporate profiteers and does not claim Iraq's oil as its own will almost certainly be welcomed by a majority of the Iraqi people. UN credibility will be severely diminished if, with or without a new Security Council resolution, the organization

sends personnel, funds or other assistance to Iraq to bolster, legitimize or "internationalize" the US occupation. Only after the US occupation ends will UN involvement in Iraq reflect its international legitimacy.

Mansour Farhang

Professor of politics, Bennington College.

Iran and the United States both have competing ambitions and common concerns in Iraq. Tehran favors popular sovereignty, political equality and majority rule in Iraq, the exact opposite of its own governing system. This emanates from the fact that the Shiites of Iraq, the Iranian theocrats' co-religionists, constitute 60 percent of Iraq's population. The Bush Administration, in contrast, advocates democracy in abstraction but fears majority rule in practice. What favors Iran in this competition is the fact that only the Shiite clerics possess the capacity for mass mobilization in Iraq. During the terror of Saddam Hussein, more than 200,000 Iraqi Shiites took refuge in Iran. Today most Iraqi Shiites are grateful to Iranians and perceive them as allies. Washington is aware of this sentiment and wants Iran to use its influence to contain the radical anti-occupation elements in the Shiite communities.

Iran's fears are another story. The Iranian authorities, like most people in the region, are convinced that Ariel Sharon and his neo-conservative allies in Washington want to ignite a civil war between the Shiites and Sunnis of Iraq, with the Kurds remaining on the sidelines. Such a war would likely engulf almost the entire region. Iran would back the Shiites, while Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf would aid the Sunnis. Al Qaeda and the pro-Saddam Baathists, like the Likud government in Israel, view such a conflict as an advantage for their competing objectives. Iran's reigning mullahs are convinced that the United States has nothing to gain and much to lose from such a conflict, but they believe the Bush Administration can be manipulated to pave the way for it.

The key to preventing this calamity is for the United States and Iran to start negotiating their differences and support a UN initiative to establish a federal system consisting of autonomous entities for the Shiites, the Kurds and the Sunnis. Iran's theocrats have used their confrontation with the United States to create crises for the purpose of justifying cruel treatment of their democratic opponents. Normalization of US-Iran relations can contribute to both the goal of peace in Iraq and the cause of democracy in Iran.

Sherle R. Schwenninger

Senior fellow, World Policy Institute at the New School University.

The most commonly proposed Democratic alternative to the Administration's policy in Iraq—turning over political authority to the United Nations and getting more countries to provide more troops and money—is well intentioned but lacks seriousness, for two reasons.

First, it is not realistic to expect the UN to assume such responsibility without more resources, without assurances from the United States about security and without some control over

the conduct of American military strategy. Likewise, it is not realistic to expect countries like Egypt, France, Germany, Russia, India and Pakistan, which opposed the war, to now commit substantial troops to Iraq in the middle of a major insurgency, especially without a larger shift in US policy. For both domestic and international reasons, these countries do not want to be seen as instruments of what they consider to be a misguided American policy toward the Middle East in general.

Second, the Democratic alternative does not go far enough to change the political dynamic from one of occupation (albeit a more legitimate one) to one of Iraqi sovereignty. After all, the UN itself has been a target of the insurgents, and there now seems to be a general mistrust and impatience with any foreign control over Iraq's future. Any proposal to stabilize Iraq must restore a sense of ownership to the Iraqi people as well as real power.

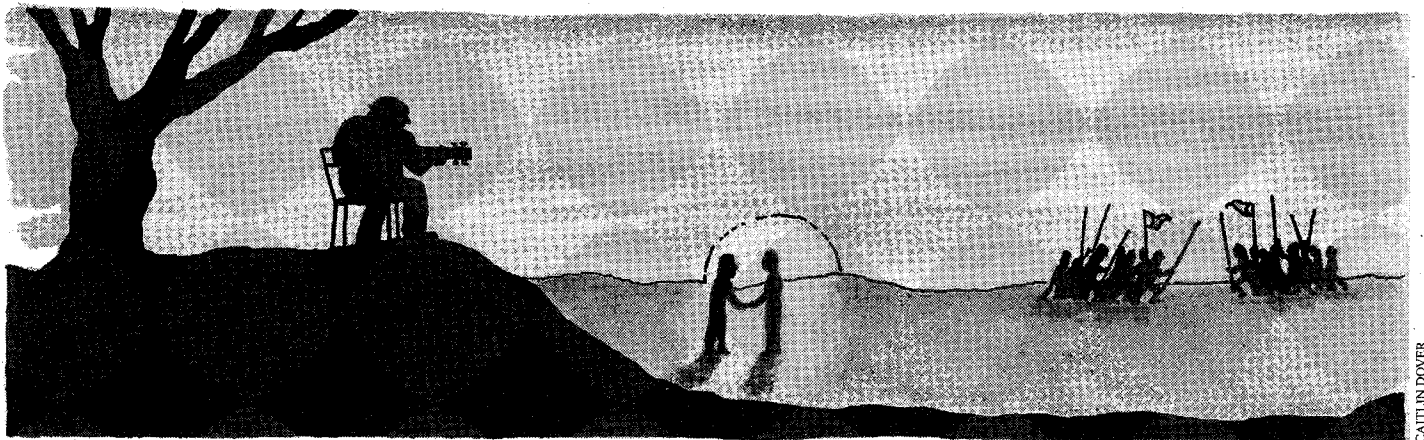
For these reasons, we need to think in bolder terms about what we can offer to the international community and to the Iraqi people in order to gain their active support for a plan that would transfer authority to the UN and to an Iraqi interim government. There would need to be three elements to this grand bargain. The first would be the promise of substantial resources to the UN, not only for this Iraqi state-building effort but also for comparable efforts in the future, including resources that would increase the capacity of the UN to provide more of its own security in the future for such missions. Unless the United States can demonstrate to the other major stakeholders in the UN that its attitude toward the organization has changed, it is unlikely to elicit more than a token response.

The second element of the grand bargain must be the internationalization of other elements of US Middle East policy that affect the political dynamic inside Iraq. It makes no sense whatsoever for other countries to commit money and security forces to Iraq as long as the United States continues to condone Israeli policy toward the Palestinians and pursues a hostile policy toward Iran and Syria. At a minimum, this means a shift in American policy toward nonbelligerence toward Iran and Syria, a commitment to a clear timetable for a Palestinian state and a commitment to a true no-weapons-of-mass-destruction zone in the Middle East, which means a commitment to confront Israel over its possession of nuclear weapons.

The third and final element would need to be a quick turnover of true sovereignty to the Iraqi people, however ill prepared they may now seem for this task. At a minimum, any interim government must have control over its own security forces and economy. To demonstrate that Iraqis own their own economy, we might consider the idea proposed by Steven Clemons of the New America Foundation, which would give every Iraqi an ownership stake in the country's oil wealth. If, for example, on June 30 every Iraqi received \$300 as a distribution of future profits from the nation's oil wealth, it might change dramatically the political dynamics within Iraq, insuring a more peaceful transition to full statehood.

But unless we are willing to think more boldly along these lines, the wiser course may be for the United States to withdraw its troops and disengage more generally from the region, allowing the Iraqi people to sort out their future, with the understanding that there may be a long period of instability, but at least the United States would not be a contributing factor to that instability and no longer a target of Arab anger and frustration. ■

WHEN TONI MORRISON AND CORNEL WEST GET TOGETHER, WHAT DO THEY TALK ABOUT?
ANSWER: EVERYTHING FROM BALDWIN TO *BELOVED* TO MEL GIBSON.



Blues, Love and Politics

On March 24 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture, The Nation Institute sponsored a conversation between Toni Morrison, recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize, member of The Nation's editorial advisory board and author of *Love*, *Beloved*, *Paradise*, *Jazz* and *The Bluest Eye*, among other books, and Cornel West, professor of religion and African-American studies at Princeton, Nation contributor and author of *Race Matters* and many other books and articles. In his introductory remarks, institute president Hamilton Fish noted that "tonight, we continue a conversation that began in 1865, the year a group of Northern abolitionists published the first issue of The Nation magazine." Following is an abridged and adapted version of that conversation; you can watch and listen to the entire conversation via a link at www.thenation.com.

—The Editors

CORNEL WEST: We want to begin just by raising the general query of how you would characterize our historical moment.

TONI MORRISON: I feel two things at the same time: terrified and melancholy, and I think in both domestic and foreign affairs it's frightening—the altercations, the agenda. There have been other frightening moments, but the melancholy that I feel now is about a country like this with the best shot in the world, that a country like this with a certain kind of plenitude and intelligence and ambition and generosity and some history from which to learn, could, indeed, throw it all away and become the worst parts of its own self.

Cornel, I see you sitting here nodding and frowning, but what is curious to me is that whenever I read you, as well as talk to you, and as clear-sighted as you are and as aware as you are of these difficulties, you always seem to be something I used to be but no longer am, optimistic. And since I'm rapidly losing that quality, maybe just because of age, I wanted to ask you why.

WEST: I've always viewed myself as a person with a deeply sad soul but a cheerful disposition. So that when you say you feel terrified and melancholic, that describes my situation too, but it's just that I always believe that struggle and the unleashing

of moral energy in the form of moral outrage can make a difference no matter what the situation is. And it may have something to do with just having a blues sensibility, a tragic orientation, a sense that no matter how mendacious elites may be, they can never extinguish the forces for good in the world. And if that's true, then they're mighty but not almighty.

And in some ways that's a characterization of just being black in America, it seems to me. Since 9/11 all Americans feel unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hatred, and that's been the situation of black folks for 400 years. In that fundamental sense, to be a nigger is to be unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hatred. And now the whole nation is niggerized, and everybody's got to deal with it. And I think we're at a moment now in which a blues nation has to learn from a blues people.

I'm thoroughly convinced, and one of the reasons why I think that your work is not just powerful and monumental but will be read hundreds and hundreds of years from now, is that it's really been the artists who have exercised what the Greeks called *parresia*, frank speech, free speech, plain speech, truth-telling in a sentimental nation. And when I read your work, I say somebody's still serious about telling the truth about the country, and it's painful, it's unnerving, it's unhousing, but somebody's still telling the truth. And I think that's true for so many artists. You've got a blues sensibility, don't you?

MORRISON: A very complicated sense of blues as it morphed or changed or influenced jazz, but for me it's a question of not whining. The blues is about some loss, some pain and some other things. But it doesn't whine; even when it's begging to be understood in the lyrics, the music contradicts that feeling of being a complete victim and completely taken over. There's a sense of agency, even when someone has broken your heart. The process of having the freedom to have made that choice is what surfaces in blues. I don't see it as a crying music.

And then what happened later with African-American music was what I was trying so hard to capture in the book *Jazz*, which was not just to put it in the so-called period but to have the text

represent the anarchy, the originality, the improvisation, the practice, the anger, the daring of the music. It was very modern in the 1920s, that sound. There was an enormous political shift in the lives of many, many black people post-Reconstruction, post-World War I. Whole towns were wiped clean of black people, running from want, running anywhere. Mostly to cities. And along with that came these sounds, and, of course, this city was legendary in terms of receiving this migrated black person.

I'm informed deeply, I think, by the music. I know I am. But the point of the novel is to not re-render it; it's to take from it its compositional qualities, its ferocity, its seduction, its temptation and the fact that it was so enormously complex.

WEST: I think one of the things that America as a whole—especially the imperial elite who rule us at the moment—is going to sooner or later have to come to terms with is that those of us who have a blues sensibility, who are committed to democracy and equality, we're able to proceed like the blues artists. And you make this wonderful point in one of your interviews, you talk about the fact that there's no vengeance and bitterness in the blues, even though there's a dogged determination.

And when you respond to terrorism, if what is motivating you is the bitterness and the vengeance, then Shakespeare says vengeance is sweet but short-term, whereas the blues folk say it's about justice and it's about looking beyond so you don't reinforce the cycle.

And there's a spiritual strength that's shot through your life and works that's connected to that blues sensibility that either America must learn, or else America will find itself caught in the same cycle of vengeance, in which we all slide down a slippery slope to chaos. And whether, in fact, America has what it takes is an open question. If America doesn't, then it just becomes another empire that, like the ebb and flow of all empires, decays and declines, and we're at each other's throat.

MORRISON: What is this absolute obsession with violence? I mean, violence is two things. First of all, it takes a certain amount of courage, physical courage, but it also requires a certain laziness of intellect. So it's both easy and hard. It's such a child's view, as is the puny language that accompanies it. I guess I shouldn't dump that on children, but it certainly is not adult.

The language of literature that is bellicose, that is warlike, is the prized language. The White House likes the word "robust." Robust. It's carnal, it's sexual, it's sensual, whether it's *The Iliad* or *Ulysses* or *Chanson de Roland*, you know, that language, or the Churchillian language. Anything opposite that is understood to be weak, wimpy, appeasing, feminine. On the other hand, just in terms of language alone, it always seemed to me that the language of Gandhi, the language of Martin Luther King, the language of Mandela, that's seemed to me the most powerful, morally persuasive language around.

Now, it's true that after World War I, I think Hemingway and other writers, especially poets, who had been in the war all said, oh, you know, this is ridiculous; let's get back to precision. There are no such things as honor or glory in war. Those words they couldn't use anymore. But following that was World War II, and people needed everything they had, all the language that was available to them, in order to finally confront such horror. But after that, not just the

gestures seemed anachronistic and sort of old, retro, but war itself seems retro somehow. Even though everybody is at war, it's somehow a genuinely outmoded idea. And the language that is produced by it is also outmoded and puny and uninspiring and trite.

I don't mean that people don't say "Yea!" but when you hear these people championing war, they almost have no recourse except lies and deceit. There's almost nothing else there for them. Because the old power of slaughter for whatever reasons—religious reasons, political reasons, tribal reasons, etc.—suddenly has lost real intellectual credibility.

WEST: I want to come back to your point about immaturity because I want to make a distinction between "childish" and "childlike." You see, the blues and jazz are childlike, the sense of awe and wonder and the mystery and perplexity of things. "Childish" is immature. And what we have now, we have the imperial elite who are adolescent and immature because they perceive their crude interests to be protected only by might, only by force.

So that you get this intersection between free-market fundamentalism, which is a market-driven capitalist society that's driven not just by profits but by ways of reproducing its own system, the oil in the Middle East and so forth and so on, but then you've got the escalating militarism, which requires a certain mentality. It's a machismo identity. The machismo identity is nothing but an insecurity and an anxiety, an inability to be human, so you have to protect your territory and so forth. And with that comes the increasing authoritarianism—Patriot Act I, and now they are trying to get Patriot Act II.

The blues tradition that goes, let's say, from Leroy Carr to your own work is not just music, it's an idiom; it's a way of being in the world, it's mature, and it takes unbelievable courage, persistence, practice, discipline, energy to be a mature, compassionate, decent person. And that's exactly what the blues fish is trying to get us to be because you can't have a democracy without it. And that's the problem with not just the White House but with Wall Street. It's the problem with City Hall; it's the problem with the Statehouse.

MORRISON: And you find the history of the culture, of African-Americans, central and representative?

WEST: Absolutely. Because when you have mature people who have compassion in their soul and a willingness to live and die for a grand ideal like democracy, you've got a force for good no matter how far it's able to move. So you get these truth-tellers who are on the underside of the society saying, my God, this hypocrisy and mendacity is overwhelming. Sooner or later the chickens are going to come home to roost.

MORRISON: So we better do something.

WEST: So you better do something. So you get some white brothers and sisters to say, You know, I think they've got a point. And some of them move, William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown and others, some of them move by self-interest. But I think we're at a moment now—and this is what's so sad, I think, about black America—we're right at the moment now when we can learn so much from black history, but so many black people themselves are deferential to the imperial project. They're deferential to the mili-



tarism. They're deferential to the free-market fundamentalism, so they chase material toys and think that somehow they can simply make the glass menagerie of America more colorful.

They are running into a burning house, as the great Jimmy Baldwin used to say. And the question is what role do, first, the artists, play, then the activists, and the intellectuals; for the larger citizenry? We're all part of it, but we have a certain calling and vocation to ply for the larger citizenry.

And when people look at your work at this particular moment, what do you want, or what are some of the things you want them to tease out, given this political crisis or emergency that we find ourselves in under the Bush Administration?

MORRISON: Well, it is interesting that you bring that up because in the very last book I wrote, in addition to whatever else the story was about, it was important that the word "love" be withdrawn from the text. I went over it and over it and over it to make sure that that word was never used except by somebody who had earned it. This was not limitless love, this was not unconditional



love, this was something that had to do with work and thinking it through. I wanted to give that term its heft, its meaning again.

So the two major women in the book—Heed and Christine, both black women, are separated economically. One is very poor, wore a man's T-shirt for a dress, and the other one is part of the upper middle class. But before they know who they are—as children, they love each other, they're very close friends—they are forced apart, separated by adults with some other agenda. They leave one another, have rather miserable lives, come back together in hostile, cold, silent contempt until one is about to lose the other. It's only after they have a real conversation can they use the word "love."

The under-, the *ur*-story, so to speak, was about contemporary conditions among African-Americans, the willingness to separate oneself from the so-called community. I'm not being nostalgic about segregation, but there was a time when we all lived together, class-wise, we went to the same church, went to the same barbershop, etc. The progress, which was real and important, meant moving out of those neighborhoods—where you have clientele that can only go to the black mortuary, that can only go to the black lawyer, that can only go to the black doctor, can only go to Cosey's Hotel. If you can go anywhere you want, well, some of those businesses and institutions and entrepreneurs collapsed. You know, the credibility and the authenticity of African-Americans in high places is street credibility, is community credibility. But we are separated by class—that was the metaphorical disaster that took place in the novel—a wrenching phenomenon. I was trying to complicate the civil rights process, interrogating it in a new way so that we would not be left with the simple notion that there was some agitation, some pain, and then, *pow*, everybody moved into whatever neighborhoods they wanted to and there was more access into the corridors of power, there was more money, you know, better jobs, etc., none of which is not true, but that's not the full story.

I think, in addition, affirmative action, the controversy about it, still plays into this huge question of the acquisition of full citizenship in this country and what it really means, not just these rights

to live or work or go to school or what have you in different places, but what happens when you have more of the liberties that you have fought and died for. I don't have the answers, but I've framed it as a physical separation as well as a psychological one.

You know, Cornel, you do your work in the academy and you teach at Sing Sing. You do your work in high schools, storefront churches and Princeton. But that's not typical. If you are an academic, then you write books and you know many people in all sorts of places. Well, to also spend time graduating some prisoners, then you're not typical. I mean, this is what you understand to be the canvas of your own work. You have defined in that sense what *Love* was really complaining about, or investigating anyway.

WEST: Ah, yes, I hear what you're saying. I mean, there are certain structural processes at work that make it difficult for us to maintain the kind of web, the care and bonds of empathy with not just the vanilla/chocolate city distinctions in the empire, but also with the materialism, the careerism, the individualism that make it difficult for us to even conceive of ourselves as part of some larger communal project.

MORRISON: Exactly. You have to work at it.

WEST: Toni, one of the things that's striking to me, I think critics 150 years, 250 years from now, in reading your work, one of the things they'll say, which is pretty elemental, is that you've got to be one of the first writers in the American literary canon who just take for granted the fundamental humanity of black people. You just assume black folks are like everybody else. They're human beings. Because that's a revolutionary notion in a civilization deeply shaped by white supremacy. The white supremacy in black people makes it difficult for black people to just accept that they're human. They've got to prove this, deal with the achievement gap, make sure their promotion is really meritorious, and all this other kind of mess.

It's true because everybody's always got you under the gaze. It's like the music, when you go to Louis Armstrong, you go to John Coltrane, they just assume black people are human beings. When you go to *Love* and you go to *Beloved*, wow, you've got to feel relaxed. And this is true for white brothers and sisters too, because they know if they look in the mirror and just see lies about themselves, that's not really comforting in the end. Because in order to make it from womb to tomb, they have to live a lie.

So they come to your text and they say, oh my God, you know what? Amy and Sethe and so forth in *Beloved*, there's a humanity that's flowing between them. And I'm not saying this to put other writers down. I mean, Melville is one of the great figures who wrestled with this issue, that's true, and there are other white writers who make the effort. But in your writings, when you talk about gaining access to rights and liberties as a result of the civil rights movement, it's so important that the breakthrough never be downplayed. But then you've still got black humanity to deal with in all of these new spaces.

MORRISON: But that's what makes it exciting. I think the point was that every African-American writer I knew about, loved and admired, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, etc., Richard Wright, and further back, had to at some point write about what it means to be a black writer, what it means to be a Negro, how that is different from anything else. Or they needed

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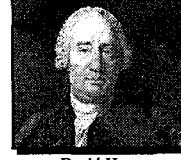
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a white person to authenticate their work, like the slave narratives used to have an acknowledgment printed to say this narrative was actually written by, etc., etc.

Whether that was necessary or not or whether it was an important question or not, they had to confront it. But it means that somebody else was being addressed. And as much as I admired, still admire, *Invisible Man*, that title says it all, because the question for me is, invisible to whom? Not me. So when I wrote, I would just, as you say, assume not just the humanity but the richness and interests—

WEST: The good and the bad, the blindnesses and the insights—

MORRISON: And no editorializing, no footnotes, no explanations, no dictionary—

WEST: Just delve into all the funky humanity of black folk and white folk and everybody else. But that's a very crucial thing. I mean, I think it's been the musicians and the preachers who've been able to do that at their best—but it's difficult for the writers because the white gaze is always there.

MORRISON: I got in a lot of trouble, you know.

WEST: And so one takes the risk in that regard, and Ralph Ellison in some ways is a transitional figure here because he's got all the humanity, and the essays are there, but he's still also got to prove himself. And as he's proving himself, he's also got to be related to the other black folk who know they have to prove themselves.

I don't think we're going to talk about getting out of the mess that we're in unless we engage the younger generation. The young folk, they're just out there and they're struggling, they've got unbelievable creativity and imagination, but trying to channel their moral outrage. They're locked into this market way of life, but they also know that it's empty and hollow in the end. In some sense, they're imitating us—our materialism, careerism and so on—but in another sense, they also have grown up in a different kind of world. I mean, their world is so market-saturated that it's hard for them to gain access to nonmarket values and activities that they can ascribe weight to because everybody's gimme gimme gimme.

MORRISON: Oh, it's pernicious. When you think of after September 11, when anybody would have done practically anything to help, I was waiting for some guy, the mayor guy, the governor guy, the presidential guy to say: Go home, see if everybody's all right, build this, organize that, check your neighbors, get some food, you know, some sort of citizen action. But what they said was, go to the malls, go to the theaters, get back on those airplanes, buy. Now, I understand what they were saying; they were saying the market is vital, you know. And the point of the attack was to destroy things, one of which would be the economy and the capitalist system, etc., so we want the markets to go on. That was one thing. But that could have been said along with some other things. So that meant that we were not to be called on as citizens, only as consumers.

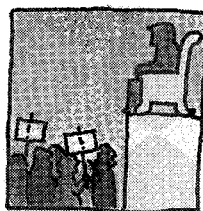
WEST: It shows just how idolatrous the market is in the culture. It's a fetish, you know. We ascribe these magical powers to it, so that your public interest and your public life are just drained.

And it's a sick civilization that would be so obsessed with the sexualization of its children, the targeting of its children as a constituency to consume, and think that somehow the future is going to be in mature hands when they're 100 percent of the future. That's not just shortsighted, that's pathological. In that sense, it's very much like white supremacy, it's a pathology that's shot through the civilization, and we have to confront our bitterness. And I love what you're talking about in terms of loving something earned, but it's still something that's worth taking a risk for.

I think, in the history of black people, we've been so hated that love takes on subversive status.

MORRISON: It's renegade. Totally renegade.

WEST: So in our culture when you talk about love supreme, this is not just a gesture. You know what I mean? And when Martin Luther King talks about love, it's not just a gesture. This thing



is rooted in a long tradition of struggle against institutionalized hatred that then becomes contagious, because other people want to be more human than they are, too, and to be in on it.

But look how we end up regenerating public life. I think that's one of our major challenges at this moment, because the market ideology and the authoritarianism and the militarism come together to constitute this new kind of configured imperialism that has colonized public life. And so you end up with very little idea of what it means to be a citizen, what we can do.

MORRISON: Will we have a good chance, do you think, in the forthcoming election?

WEST: Well, I hope so. I hope so. I think we've got to have a united front against the imperial elites who rule us.

It's about time for the questions. [reading] "If Condoleezza Rice were with us this evening, what would you say to her?"

MORRISON: Oh, I would strongly suggest that Condoleezza Rice get another job. I know how seductive power is. She is a beautifully educated woman, she's a gifted woman, she's a talented woman. She has a lot of attributes. Why trash them in an area—I know that she has benefited time and time again from that part of the political spectrum, and particularly from that family, but loyalty is not all there is in life. There is something called real integrity, and I don't think she understands that.

[reading] "What are your reflections on the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision this May?" Well, I might as well do a little self-promotion here, I hope you don't mind. I was asked to do a memorial book about the fiftieth anniversary by Houghton Mifflin, a children's book. We put together some very beautiful pictures from the period, and I wrote imaginary captions underneath. And the book is called *Remember*. And it's for young people, children in elementary school, who weren't there, don't remember, don't know quite what it was.

But what's interesting to me about this period, in addition to everything else—the Supreme Court, the lawyers for the NAACP, all these families filing suit, the marches, etc.—at the center, at the forefront, on the front line were children, little children who were led into school—with guns, perhaps, and their parents—

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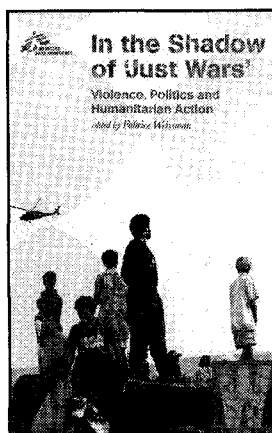
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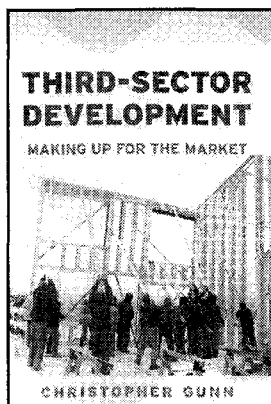
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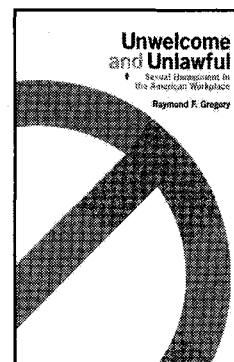
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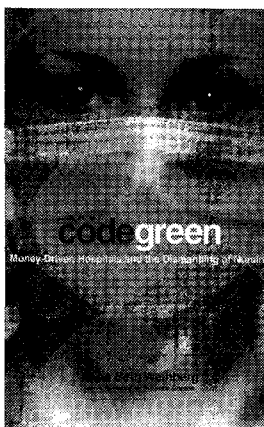
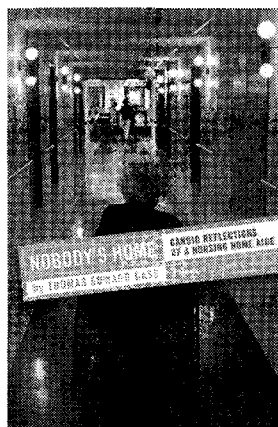
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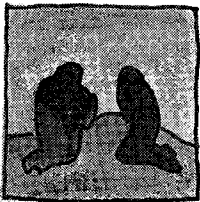
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but had to go in that building and stay there all day, alone. Sometimes two or three. And they did it, obviously because they were told, but what they knew, and this is what was extraordinary to me, they knew they were doing it for something bigger than they were.

They were 8 years old, 9 years old, 10 years old, in their little dresses and their little suits and going in these places, and then having grown people—can you imagine what it's like to be an 8 year old and having adults screaming at you, spitting at you? All right, when you got home, you were in your mother's arms and your father was there, and you knew you had that support, but at the moment, these were strangers, white women who were mothers who could actually do that to another mother's child. It really boggles the mind.

So I was thinking about not just the courage of their gesture but its uniqueness. They were out front. And I wanted young people who are now also 8 and 9 to feel the connection. That for me was more intimate than the history books and the movies and so on.



[reading] "Could you speak about black leadership in America? What are the conditions we need to change?" This begs the question that we need it and there isn't any or it's not working or something. What do you think?

WEST: Well, when I talked about mediocrity in terms of leadership, I was making a multiracial statement.

We've got to keep in mind that there are different levels of leadership. In a democracy the real leadership's on the ground. We are the leaders we're looking for, grassroots activists. You've got televisual leadership, you've got elected leadership. In televisual leadership, you've got a small slice of courageous, prophetic folk. In elected leadership, you've got a smaller slice of prophetic, courageous folk. Most of the major leaders in the society are grassroots leaders, and that's what Martin was, that's what Fannie was, Fannie Lou Hamer, that's Myles Horton's idea, a white brother, that's what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was. They were grassroots leaders. And it's the spilling over of that high-quality grassroots leadership into the political system and the economic system.

That's why I think hip-hop culture is so important, because you've got a highly colonized form among young folk where you get the very deeply reactionary hip-hop artists who are into misogyny and homophobia and so forth, and it all mirrors the larger forces in our society. But a lot of the courageous hip-hop artists can't get a contract because they don't have access to the recording industry and A&R departments.

But that's also so true for the tenant activists, that's true for those wrestling with ecological crises, that's true for those dealing with the issue of homophobia, the vicious forms of homophobia that are surfacing now around gay marriage and so on.

MORRISON: Here's a question about what you just said. [reading] "John Kerry says he supports civil unions and not gay marriage—separate but equal, back-of-the-bus politics, question mark. Is gay marriage a question of civil rights?"

WEST: Absolutely.

MORRISON: I would say so.

WEST: It's equality under the law. There's no doubt about that.

MORRISON: Here's an interesting question, which I think we touched on generally. [reading] "Do you think the average black person perceived 9/11 differently than a white person?" That question probably means a lot of things. I don't think there was any difference in the way it was perceived. A lot of black people died in that attack as well as whites. I mean, you know, that was not a racial moment.

But what happened afterward, the consequences of it, there was the need to say this is not about Islam, this is about terror, etc. But I do remember my own son saying—and you may have heard this too—that right afterward, when there was still the fear, black men, black African men, black American men, they were looked at differently.... There was this we-know-who-you-are sigh of relief. Blacks were the demons before 9/11, particularly men. And suddenly they were welcome in a way that they had never been before. Am I right about that? Because they were being split away from what whites perceived as Arabic or, you know, whatever other group—

WEST: Islam—in some stereotypical sense.

MORRISON: That's right.

WEST: I mean, it did bring out the worst in some black folk, I think, because you might recall the poll in *USA Today* that said a significant number of black folk supported the racial profiling of Arab brothers and sisters just to get some weight off their back, you know what I mean. They're no longer the group that's being profiled, just shift it onto somebody else.

I believe in moral consistency. You've got to oppose racial profiling no matter what. I think the tears of [Abner] Louima's mother ought to be integral to the tears that we share for innocent folk who are murdered by gangsters. And it's not just Louima. I thought about the tears of Jewish Israeli mothers attacked by gangsters of suicide bombers. I thought of the tears of Palestinian mothers with their babies crushed by a state terrorism.

MORRISON: You can't rank these things.

WEST: All these are human at that deepest level.

MORRISON: Exactly. [reading] "There was a time in this country when arts that we take for granted, education, writing, etc., were revolutionary acts, and we seem to have lost that notion. How can we, especially African-Americans, regain that revolutionary spirit and mindset?" I always took for granted that the best art was political and was revolutionary. It doesn't mean that art has an agenda or a politics to argue; it means the questions being raised were explorations into kinds of anarchy, kinds of change, identifying errors, flaws, vulnerabilities in systems.

Now I suppose there is something called benign, apolitical art, and some people accuse postmodernism of being exactly that, but in a sense each generation responds to the ones before. For me the big revolutionary period in terms of art that affected me most was during the '50s, during the McCarthy period, when there was this blanket notion that no one should speak about anything political, and people who did were being fired and losing their jobs and losing their homes. So that the few people who were able to talk about that were the ones who I felt were forthright, brilliant writers who had courage. Those writers and artists and filmmakers and people in the theater who were trying to buck political censorship and

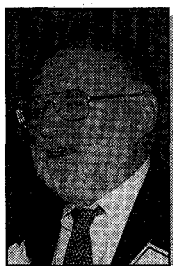
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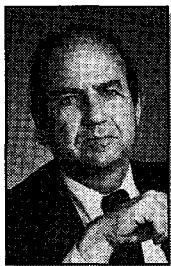
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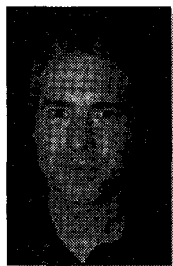
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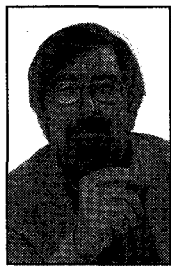
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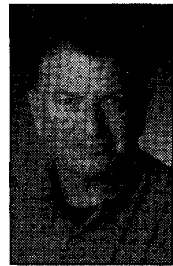
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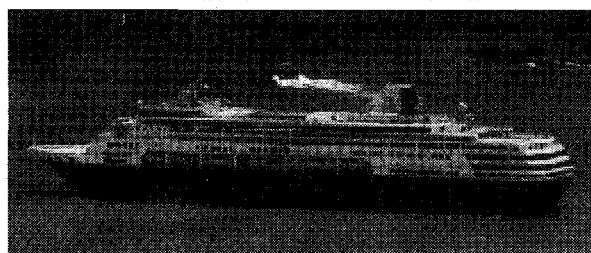
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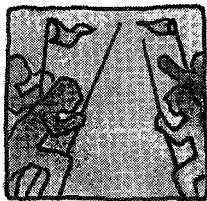
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who suffered a lot, that's what I remember. I know there were other revolutionary artists who had written long ago about oppression, but those were the contemporary artists that I gravitated toward.

WEST: I think there might be a tendency, because America is so preoccupied with the practical and the utilitarian and the consequentialist, that when the phrase "revolutionary art" is used, people might get the impression that art has the capacity to make revolution. Revolutions are made by social movements, and artists



might be a part of those social movements. There are works of art that are revolutionary. I think Shakespeare was revolutionary, I think Beethoven was revolutionary. I think Eugene O'Neill was, I think your work is. But I would never call it revolutionary art in that sense. I would just say it's the best art

I know. But it might be aligned with a social movement whose end is to engage in a fundamental transformation of society.

And so I think an artist should always be suspicious of being called just a revolutionary artist because you might be used by a certain revolutionary movement. But at the same time, as the truth-telling you engage in has impact and might, in fact, be part of some group of citizens who are organized and trying to change society in a fundamental way, then I think that is a part of it.

And I think we do have a number of voices. You've got Tony Kushner, you've got Dead Prez and hip-hop, you've got Ty and KRS-One; I think Nilo Cruz's recent work is quite powerful in this regard in terms of truth-telling. So I was thinking about that in relation to the question. But I'm not an artist, so I ought to shut my mouth.

MORRISON: [reading] "I am curious about the language of religion, which has become more pronounced in this Administration. Can you comment on the manipulation of religious belief and language for violent ends?"

WEST: That's one of the most dangerous features of our moment, there's no doubt about that. We live in a society in which 96 percent of our fellow citizens believe in God, and 72 percent believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, 71 percent believe that the Book of Revelation has an empirically verifiable potential and 71 percent believe in angels. I don't put that down, I'm a Christian myself, but I'm a different kind of Christian than a lot of these Christians.

But when you have those kinds of beliefs so deeply held, subject to multiple interpretation but able to be mobilized for right-wing purposes, and as the Christian right began to organize, to bastardize and pulverize Martin Luther King's attempt to try to use the best of the Christian prophetic tradition for democratic aims, all of the homophobia, all of the patriarchy, all of the worst of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, can be mobilized in the name of Jesus. That's what's difficult. This is true for the Mel Gibson film; it's part of the political discourse.

MORRISON: Did you see the film?

WEST: I refuse to see the film. Because as a Christian any time I hear the juxtaposition of Roman innocence in the Roman Empire with Jewish responsibility, I already know it's anti-Semitic.

MORRISON: Well, I saw the movie. I went with a friend. We

sort of crept in because everybody said, Toni, don't go. Please, don't give him your money. I wasn't going to go, but it got so hot and it's so controversial and so big, I thought, wait a minute, I don't want to be told what to think, let me go see what this is. Now, you know, I'm a Catholic, right, so we're used to images of blood and gore. Also, I have to tell you, I was very depressed when I went, and sometimes (I feel ashamed about it), but sometimes, you know, sometimes you just want to escape into a good murder mystery or something. A little fictional Armageddon. So I went with a friend, and I have to tell you at least one thing. Maybe I'll tell you two things. One, I fell asleep. I'm not entirely sure why. I did wake up when I heard a pow, a lash.

I don't regard that as film criticism at all, but I have to tell you that in some way it was boring. It was simply the Stations of the Cross, and you recognize them immediately. And if you don't, it may be incomprehensible, as it was to my friend, who is, well, she's sort of vaguely New Agey, a wonderful person, spiritual, noninstitutional and Jewish. And she was bored, too, because she didn't understand the narrative. You know, there was build but no structure, no suspense. It's just—

WEST: Torture, torture, torture, torture.

MORRISON: Yes.

WEST: I can't take that. Because the other side of this thing is that here we are, living in the biggest empire since the Roman Empire. Now the underside of the Roman Empire is the cross; that's why political prisoners were put to death, those who had the courage to act against the powers that be. We're the legatees of Constantinian Christianity, after Christianity was incorporated into the Roman Empire and was the official religion of the Roman Empire, which went on persecuting Jews and others.

Now, you see, I'm a prophetic Christian, I'm not a Constantinian Christian. That's very important. Because I want to raise the question, well, if you're going to talk about Jesus, did you really talk about the empire that put him to death and what the connection is between that empire and the empire that we're a part of now, and what Jesus demands of us in this empire given what he was willing to sacrifice in his own imperial moment? And I say now, Gibson, what have you got to say? But, he says, no, I'm going to give you sadomasochistic voyeurism.

MORRISON: Right, that's what it is. But although the bloodiness was uninteresting, excessive, repulsive, etc., I was trying to persuade myself that instead of dwelling merely on the spirit of Jesus, this film was really about his flesh, and we often forget that and sanitize the crucifixion. This is real human suffering. I was looking at it like a lynching. This is an innocent and betrayed man who's being lynched. I didn't want to look away. I wanted to endure it. But that was my effort to bring meaning into the film. The film was not necessarily bringing meaning to me. You understand me?

WEST: I hear you. But it's part of a political moment. On the one hand, you've got Jewish brothers and sisters who know that it's anti-Semitic. But then you've got Constantinian Jewish folk who themselves are deferential to the American empire who now find themselves on the other side because they've become completely assimilated into American power at its highest level, who don't want to speak the truth about the Middle East and the

Israeli-Palestinian situation, and yet all of a sudden, now they're so upset that they say, well, how come the people don't recognize our victimization?

I say, no, I'm in solidarity with you Jewish brothers and sisters even if you're Constantinian Jews. But you ought to be serious about why you're deferential to the American empire and why you've got these conservative Jewish brothers in alliance with the Christian evangelical folk who are the social base of the film. What makes Jewish folks think this is the Promised Land? If America has to make a choice between oil and Israel, please. You know what I mean? The Jewish brothers and sisters better get back to their prophetic tradition, and that means becoming blues people.

MORRISON: Well, this question will take you to another continent. [reading] "What are your thoughts on the spectacle of Africa in the USA? Where and how can we reconnect with African-Americans?"

There's extraordinary good news coming out of Africa and some really terrible news. These wars are the children of previous wars. The consequences of chopping up Africa by Europeans and all these subsequent internal wars reinforce the same elements. That's what this country has often produced, not just encouraged, which is a series of dictatorial regimes that are willing and able and seduced into the destruction of their own people. And then there are other places in Africa where that is simply not so.

WEST: To me, Africa has produced probably the most towering statesman of our time, Nelson Mandela, and Botswana's democratic experiment is very important. But I think you're right, I think any time we think about Africa, you've got to think of three elements—you've got to think of the vicious imperial past of Europe, you've got to think of the vicious autocratic leadership that emerged after that great heroic moment of anticolonial struggle against those empires, and you have to think of the neglect of the American empire vis-à-vis the suffering of African people.

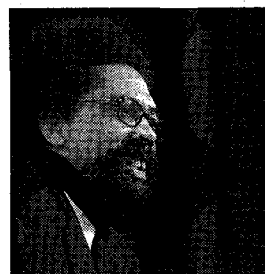
What is it, a dime for every African on the foreign aid list of the richest nation in the history of the world? Everybody in this room knows if the AIDS epidemic were taking place in Berlin, London, Lisbon and Paris, there'd be a qualitatively different response of American elites, as opposed to what's taking place in Africa. And I say that without bitterness. It's just a fact.

So that Africans must be more responsible and accountable, and those vicious elites that are ruling their own people and chopping them up need to be accountable, but they're responding to this ugly imperial past to divide up the territory. You're after their resources. You already demeaned their humanity and so forth and so on. And some have responded heroically. Nelson Mandela was on the American terrorist list for twenty-six years. Now everybody loves him. We used to march for Mandela, and they said we were supporting a terrorist.

And yet Africans do have to take responsibility. It's a twofold project, but I just wish we were more engaged with our foreign policy.

MORRISON: Well, that's really what the question was about. [reading] "Where and how can we reconnect?" "We" meaning Africans with African-Americans. I have to say that one of the reasons I was able to abandon what I felt in the early stages of my own career—that gaze of the other—was by reading African literature. I was able to because of the fiction of African writers.

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Photos: Darryl Pitt

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They gave me license. Chinua Achebe gave me license. Bessie Head gave me license. When I read them, suddenly, whatever they were talking about, the white gaze was absent. And so I knew there was a territory there in language.

WEST: Now was that because they accepted the fundamental humanity of African people?

MORRISON: Yes, precisely.

WEST: What was the name of that novel you wrote about in the *New York Review of Books*?

MORRISON: Oh, *The Radiance of the King*. There are so many narratives of the white man in Africa, but never told from the African point of view. And now, in Camara Laye's novel, here comes the white man into Africa with no resources. He doesn't have a job. He doesn't have any money. He doesn't have any other white people who like him. He's really alone. All alone. No gun. No safari. And what does he want? He's a European, so of course he wants to work for the king. And the Africans said, "I beg your pardon. What skills do you have?" It was just a whole upside—

WEST: Turned the world upside down. ■

LAS VEGAS IS CAPITALISM STRIPPED BARE: IF YOU'RE OUT OF MONEY, YOU'RE OUT OF LUCK.

America's Last Honest Place

MARC COOPER

Las Vegas

This city is often described as one of dreams and fantasy, of tinselish make-believe. But this is getting it backward. Vegas is instead the American market ethic stripped bare, a mini-world totally free of the pretenses and protocols of modern consumer capitalism. As one local gambling researcher says gleefully: "What other city in America puts up giant roadside billboards promoting 97 percent guaranteed payback on slot play? In other words, you give us a buck and we'll give you back 97 cents. That's why I love my hometown."

Even that stomach-churning instant when the last chip is swept away can be charged with an existential *frisson*. Maybe that's why they say that the difference between praying here and praying anywhere else is that here you really mean it. All the previous hours of over-the-table chitchat, of know-it-all exchanges between the ice-cool dealer and the cynical writer from the big city, the kibitzing with the T-shirted rubes and the open-shirted sharpies to my right and left, the false promises of the coins clanging into the trays behind me, the little stories I tell myself while my stack of chips shrinks and swells and then shrivels some more—all of this comes to an abrupt, crashing halt when the last chip goes back in the dealer's tray. "No seats for the onlookers, sir."

And the other players at the table—the dealer who a moment ago was my buddy, the solicitous pit boss, the guy from Iowa in short khakis and topsiders peering over my shoulder—no longer give a fuck whether I live or die. And while winning is always better, it's even in moments of loss like this that I feel a certain perverse thrill. It's one of the few totally honest interludes you can have in modern America. All the pretense, all the sentimentality, the euphemisms, hypocrisies, come-ons, loss leaders, warranties and guarantees, all the fairy tales are out the window.

Marc Cooper is a contributing editor to *The Nation*. This article is adapted from his latest book, *The Last Honest Place in America: Paradise and Perdition in the New Las Vegas* (*Nation Books*).



You're out of money? OK, good—now get lost.

In a city where the only currency is currency, there is a table-level democracy of luck. Las Vegas is perhaps the most color-blind, class-free place in America. As long as your cash or credit line holds out, no one gives a damn about your race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, address, family lineage, voter registration or even your criminal arrest record. As long as you have chips on the table, Vegas deftly casts you as the star in an around-the-clock extravaganza.

For all of America's manifold unfulfilled promises of upward mobility, Vegas is the only place guaranteed to come through—even if it's for a fleeting weekend. You may never, in fact, surpass the Joneses, but with the two-night, three-day special at the Sahara, buffet and show included, free valet parking and maybe a comped breakfast at the coffee shop, you can certainly live like them for seventy-two hours—while never having to as much as change out of your flip-flops, tank top or NASCAR cap.

"Las Vegas as America, America as Las Vegas. It's like what came first? The chicken or the egg?" says Vegas historian Michael Green. "Fresno, California, doesn't have a row of casinos, but you can be sure it has some part of town where you can go for vice even though it's supposed to be illegal. Here it's not necessarily vice in the first place, but it's certainly not illegal. We have the same sort of stuff and more. Except that unlike in most places, here it's just out in the open."

What extraordinary prescience social critic Neil Postman displayed when he wrote in his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that Las Vegas—where Wall Street corporations had replaced mafias and mobs—should be considered the "symbolic capital" of America. "At different times in our history," Postman wrote, "different cities have been the focal point of a radiating American spirit." In the era of the Revolutionary War, Boston embodied the ideals of freedom; in the mid-nineteenth century, "New York became the symbol of a melting-pot America." In the early twentieth century, the brawn and inventiveness of American industry and culture were captured in the energy of Chicago.

"Today," Postman concluded, "we must look to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, as a metaphor of our national character and aspiration, its symbol a thirty-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, our religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice."

When Postman penned these words, little could he imagine that the Vegas he was writing about was the "old" Las Vegas and that Sin City was just a few years away from a radical makeover. Nor could Postman fully fathom that America itself was in the throes of a cataclysmic transformation. The more both places changed, the more they mirrored each other. In 1989 Steve Wynn—with junk-bond financing from Michael Milken—stunned the Strip with his \$700 million Mirage Hotel and Casino and touched off a revolution. One after another, the old Rat Pack-era hotels were dynamited and in their place rose staggering Leviathans of modern, market-based entertainment: the biggest casino in the world, then the biggest hotel in the world, then the most expensive hotel in the world, the biggest man-made hotel lake in the world, the hotel with the biggest rooms in the world, and so on.

Las Vegas is one city where unskilled labor can still—thanks to vibrant unions and wealthy, efficient employers—earn middle-class wages.

If economist Joseph Schumpeter was correct in theorizing that "creative destruction is the essential fact about capitalism," then capitalism as practiced in Las Vegas is the purest strain. The erection of the Vegas mega-resorts was not only heralded by the televised dynamiting of their predecessors but also accompanied by the concurrent collapse of much of the rest of America's urban, industrial and employment infrastructure. Isn't it logical or at least fitting that Las Vegas, the City of the Eternal Now, the town that every few years seems to slather yet one more layer of pavement and glitz over its own scant history, tradition and roots, would expand just as long-entrenched communities from Southeast Los Angeles to Lima, Ohio, evaporated into the deindustrialized dust of globalization?

Indeed, just as quickly as Las Vegas consumes and erases the past and scrambles the present, it now shines to many as an attractive beacon of the future. Unlike almost any other place in America, Las Vegas is one city where unskilled labor can still—thanks to vibrant unions and wealthy and efficient employers—earn middle-class wages. Vegas food servers, car parkers, cashiers, even maids, can still buy into the new American dream, purchasing a house and putting their kids through school. A high school grad can become a professional dealer for three hundred bucks' worth of tuition and a few weeks of practice pitching cards—and most likely get a job. Where else in America can you regularly find 60-year-old, bouffant-coiffed cocktail waitresses proudly wearing union buttons (those of the mighty Culinary Workers Local 226) and going home to peruse the statements of their fattening pension accounts?

Even though the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center

slowed (slightly) what has traditionally been the recession-proof Vegas economy, a steady stream of 5,000–6,000 domestic economic refugees a month still pour into and around the city. Only 6 percent of adults living in Vegas's Clark County were born here—the lowest such figure anywhere in America. And although water supplies are drying up, schools are strained and suicide and domestic violence rates are among the highest in the nation, they keep pouring in. Purchasers of new houses—at prices far below those of the two coasts—are wait-listed. Vegas's population doubled during the 1980s, and doubled again in the '90s. Vegas continues to be the fastest-growing metropolitan area in America.

This generation of immigrants, however, is different in many ways from the grifters, hustlers and outcasts who huddled here over the past century. Sure, there will always be a certain batch of trimmers, fugitives and shakedown artists looking to launder

themselves in the Vegas

sun. But most of those now crowding into Las Vegas are fleeing from an America where everyday life has become too much of a gamble—

where either the Reagan recession of 1981, the Bush slump of 1990 or the burst bubble of a decade later has left them as devastated as a blackjack player who bet it all only to have his pair of tens get trounced by the dealer's Ace-King. The only risk they are interested in now is the off chance that Vegas can provide the normalcy, the security, the certainty, that once underpinned their lives, or at least their dreams.

What a turnaround it has been for once lowly Las Vegas—and for the nation around it. Barely fifteen years ago, the august Citicorp was queasy about publicly admitting that its major credit-card processing center had been relocated to an unincorporated suburb of Las Vegas. A deal with state authorities allowed the banking corporation to postmark and camouflage its mail as coming from "The Lakes, Nevada" instead of from sinful Vegas. Today, that same neighborhood sports several high-end casinos and luxury hotels. And Citicorp's own credibility, in the aftermath of the great Wall Street accounting scandals, ranks somewhere below that of a midtown three-card-monte hustler.

Nor could Neil Postman have known back in 1985 that casino gambling was about to be fully destigmatized within a decade—and delicately renamed "gaming." The resulting shift in public attitudes would not only definitively cleanse Vegas's image but also net it a growing bonanza. As recently as 1988, casino gambling was legal only in Nevada and in Atlantic City. But as American industry continued to wash up offshore and the commercial tax base atrophied, one strapped state and municipality after another turned its forlorn eyes toward the gaming tables and slot machines. Impoverished Indian tribes were more than willing to sign gambling compacts with state governments. The result: Now twenty-seven states have Nevada-style casinos, and forty-eight states have at least some form of legal gambling. With local budgets again being squeezed by burgeoning deficits, government itself is thinking about going into the casino business. In the spring of 2003, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley said he'd like to open a municipal casino. Before the 1989 opening of the Mirage unleashed the New Vegas revolution, only 15 percent of

Americans had ever visited the city. By mid-decade that number had doubled. In its 1996 annual report, Circus Circus celebrated the news: "In an era when social attitudes toward play, and the means to afford it, have dramatically changed, so has the role of the casino."

The past seven years have shown an ever more dramatic shift toward the mainstreaming of gambling. A gambling-industry poll claimed that in the single year of 2001, 51 million Americans—more than a quarter of the population over age 21—visited a casino, chalking up a national total of almost 300 million visits. More than 430 commercial casinos nationwide brought in \$26.5 billion in revenue—two and a half times what Americans spent on movie tickets, \$5 billion more than they spent on DVDs and videos, and \$3 billion more than on cosmetics and toiletries.

The explosion of legalized gambling nationwide has had little but positive impact on Las Vegas. "All it did was increase the average Joe's appetite for gambling," says a veteran Vegas Strip pit boss. "You know, it's like baseball. We see all those local Indian casinos and riverboat casinos and local slot parlors as our farm teams. They suck in a lot of average American types who never thought about gambling before. But once you play on the farm team, who doesn't want to play in the majors? And Las Vegas is the friggin' World Series. It's kind of like, You build the casinos out there and they'll come. But eventually they'll come here."

The difference between the marketing of Vegas a half-century ago and today is precisely the difference in mainstream American attitudes. "Fifty years ago, Lucille Ball was pregnant, and they couldn't say that word on *I Love Lucy*," says historian Green. "Today we have lesbian kisses on TV. We have the word 'bullshit' on prime time, not to talk about cable programming. As the culture has become more open, Las Vegas can market itself more honestly." And, Green might add, there's a whole new line of *Lucy*-themed slot machines now out on casino floors.

In a time when Martha Stewart gets busted, Mark McGwire is

on chemicals and Sammy Sosa gets caught with a corker; when everyday economic life in America has become a breathtaking risk and it's an all-out crapshoot whether you'll still have a job next month or your HMO will cover your spinal tap or you can hock the house for enough to pay for your kid's college tuition, who can say whether it would have really been that stupid to let it all ride on 18 Red? Was it smarter to invest ten years of savings in an Enron-backed 401(k) or to spend your time studying the probability charts for single-deck blackjack? Is the integrity of the roulette wheels at the Bellagio more tainted than the quarterly corporate reports coming out of WorldCom? Both are iffy propositions, but at least in Vegas the rules of the game are clear-cut, the industry tightly regulated and the unfavorable odds publicly posted. There are no multimillion-dollar-a-year cable TV touts telling you that red or black or double-zero green is the next best thing or that life somehow owes you an eternal double-digit annual return. Haven't we, in fact, reached a point in our culture where the button-down bankers and arbitrageurs have become the reckless "casino capitalists," while those who actually run the casinos can get away with labeling themselves responsible and conservative "entertainment visionaries"? Even if they are, increasingly, often the same people?

A couple of years back at a gambling industry convention in Las Vegas, the chief financial officers of three major casinos sat on a public panel. When someone from the floor asked if investment in the casino business was a good bet, one of the CFOs answered, essentially: The difference between us and Enron is that at least our money is real. That globally recognized icon of Las Vegas, the neon-lit, hand-waving cowboy Vegas Vic, unveiled in 1947 and still presiding over downtown's Fremont Street, used to regularly and electronically call out "Howdy, pardner" until the complaints of card-groggy hotel guests got him permanently muted. But if Vic could speak today, he might well be saying, "Welcome to Las Vegas, pardner. The last honest place in America." ■

LETTERS

C O N T I N U E D

(Continued From Page 2)

FITZGERALD REPLIES

New York City

■ I thank Michael Meeropol. I am not at all surprised by what Melvin Goodman says—and, if true, it makes my point even more strongly.

FRANCES FITZGERALD

THE NEW YORK ISLAND

New York City

■ As Phillip Lopate's editor on *Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan*, I commend John Palattella's review ["Water's Edge," April 12]. Every editor—and author—wants such a well-written, well-researched, informative review.

DOUG PEPPER
Crown Publishers

New York City

■ Bemoaning the death of the Westway super-highway, Phillip Lopate mentions New York's

"fractious civic culture, better suited to stop anything from getting built, than to respond creatively to the need for fresh urban solutions." As someone in the Westway fray, I know our side had a vision. We pressed for that boondoggle to be traded in for what the city really needed: money to fix our crumbling transit system. Our work won \$1.4 billion to buy new subway cars and buses and rebuild the infrastructure. So every time a New Yorker gets off the subway at Coney Island or the bus at Orchard Beach, the Westway foes helped get them to the water's edge.

GENE RUSSIANOFF

NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

New York City

■ Several years ago Phillip Lopate joined the Shorewalkers' Great Saunter (see www.shorewalkers.org), on which one encounters magnificent miles of park along the Harlem River, beautiful and historic bridges beneath spectacular highlands, a waterside path with views of

the curvaceous East River, green islands, sea-birds, Jefferson Park, fishermen and ever-changing marine views of Queens and Lower Manhattan. Lopate saw public-housing projects, to which he devoted an entire chapter. I found some thoughtful and good writing in his book. But for reviewer John Palattella to compare Lopate's meandering flotsam to Joseph Mitchell's *The Bottom of the Harbor* is literary sacrilege.

CY A. ADLER, author

Walking Manhattan's Rim;

Walking the Hudson Batt to Bear

MINDING OUR PMs & AMs

■ Jeff Jarvis's May 17 "F*cked by the F*CC" defines the term "safe harbor" as the period from 6 AM to 10 PM, when "indecent" programming is banned. Actually, the term applies to the 10 PM to 6 AM period, when restraints are loosened. Readers may decide for themselves whether there's safety in either harbor.

BOOKS & THE ARTS

Evidence of Things Not Seen

CHRIS HEDGES

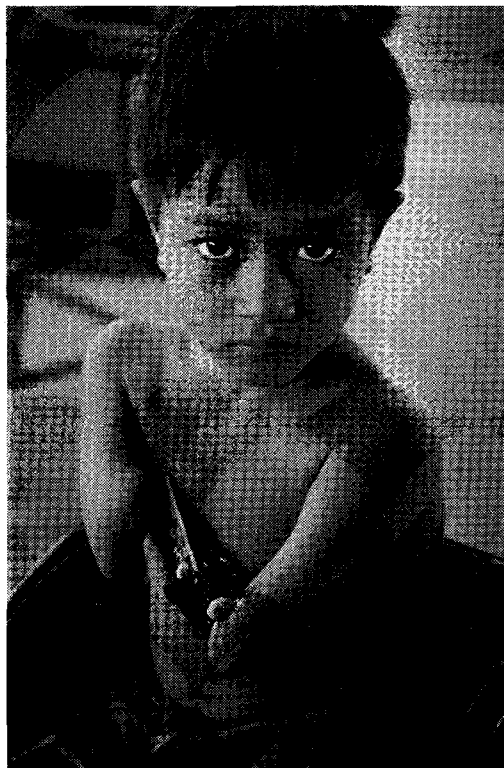
AGENT ORANGE: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam.By Philip Jones Griffiths.
Trolley. 176 pp. \$39.95.

My father and most of my uncles fought in World War II. I grew up in the shadow of the war. But it was not the romantic war of movies and books, although this romance infected me as it did all of the other farm kids in my town. It was the war of the emotionally and physically maimed. My father, who had been an army sergeant in North Africa, went to seminary after the war and became a Presbyterian minister. When he spoke about the war you could almost see him push his rifle away. He loathed the military and especially the lie that war is about glory and manhood and patriotism. When our family visited museums he steered us away from the ordered displays of weapons, the rows of muskets and artillery pieces, which gleamed from behind cases or roped-off areas.

He was an early opponent of the Vietnam War. During a Fourth of July parade in the farm town where I grew up he turned to me as the paunchy veterans walked past and said acidly, "Always remember, most of those guys were fixing the trucks in the rear." He hated the VFW hall where these men went, mostly to drink. He found their periodic attempts to re-create the comradeship of war, something that of course could never be re-created, pathetic and sad. When I was about 12 in 1968 he told me that if I was drafted for the Vietnam War he would go to prison with me. To this day I have a vision of sitting in a jail cell with my dad.

But it was my Uncle Maurice I thought most about as I looked through the images in *Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam*, by the photographer Philip Jones Griffiths. Uncle Maurice was in the regular

Army in 1939 in the South Pacific and fought there until he was wounded five years later by a mortar blast. He did not return home with my father's resilience, although he shared my father's anger and feeling of betrayal. His life was destroyed by the war. He refused to accept his medals, including his Purple Heart.



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Maurice would sit around the stove in my grandmother's home and shake as he struggled to ward off the periodic bouts of malaria. He did not talk about the war. And so he drank. He became an acute embarrassment to our family, who lived in a manse where there was no alcohol. He could not hold down a job. His marriage fell apart. Another uncle hired him to work in his lumber mill, but Maurice would show up late, often drunk, and then disappear on another binge. He finally drank himself to death in his trailer, but not before borrowing and selling the hunting rifle my grandfather had promised me. The money, I am

Chris Hedges, a reporter for the New York Times, has covered wars over the past two decades in Central America, the Middle East, Africa, Bosnia and Kosovo. He is the author of War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning (Anchor).

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sure, went for a few more bottles.

There was only one time he ever spoke to me about the war. It was at my grandmother's kitchen table. He spoke in a flat monotone. His eyes seemed to be looking far away, far across the field outside the house and the warmth of the heavy porcelain stove, far across the snowy peaks, to a world that he could never hope to explain.

"We filled our canteens up in a stream once," he said. "When we went around the bend there were twenty-five dead Japanese in the water."

Those who pay the price, those who are maimed forever by war, are shunted aside, crumpled up and thrown away.

They are war's refuse. We do not want to see them. We do not want to hear them. They are doomed, like wandering spirits, to float around the edges of our consciousness, ignored, even reviled. The message they bear from war is too painful for us to absorb. And so we turn our backs, just as society turned its back on my uncle, as it turns its back on all who come back and struggle with the horrors of wounds, physical and emotional.

In 1962 the United States set out to destroy the crops and forests that gave succor and sanctuary to the Vietcong. The herbicide our government used to accomplish this task became known as Agent Orange, after the color of the canisters used to distribute it. Some of the herbicide contained dioxin, one of the world's deadliest poisons. This herbicide had cataclysmic effects on the foliage of Vietnam, but it also seems to have sown a "genetic time bomb" that has left in its wake thousands of deformed children. Many died shortly after birth. Griffiths has set out to photograph those unfortunates who survived.

There is a fierce debate about the link between the deformities and the herbicide, but the incidence of birth defects in areas that were sprayed is substantially higher than in those that were not sprayed. The wives of US servicemen who were exposed to Agent Orange gave birth to a disproportionate number of deformed babies. The affected families of Vietnam veterans were paid \$180 million by the chemical companies that produced the herbicide, although none accepted liability. Needless to say, the Vietnamese victims as well as Vietnam veterans from other nations, such as South Korea and Australia, have received nothing.

The only way to understand war is to see it from the perspective of the victims. The face of war is in this book. It stares out at you from the formaldehyde bottles that entomb dead infants with savage deformities.

It stares out at you in the portraits of orphans, crippled, plagued by skin diseases, abandoned in hospitals and orphanages. It stares out at you in the pictures from the village of Cam Nghia in central Vietnam, where one out of ten children is born with deformities. In Cam Nghia families care for children who suffer from spina bifida, mental retardation, blindness and tumors, children born years after the war but wounded as if the war never ended.

Those maimed by war are doomed, like wandering spirits, to float around the edges of our consciousness, ignored, even reviled.

We prefer the myth of war, the myth of glory, honor, patriotism and heroism, abstract words that in the terror and brutality of combat are empty and meaningless, abstract words that mask the plague of war, abstract words that are obscene to those ravaged by war. The children in this book know war.

I too went to war, not as a soldier, but as a war correspondent. I too battle the demons that defeated my uncle. Perhaps it is hopeless to expect anyone to listen. This book is hard to look at, just as war is hard to see. The myth has a powerful, intoxicating draw. It permits us to make real the darkest undercurrents of our fantasy life. It permits us to destroy, not only things but other human beings. And in that power of wholesale destruction we feel the power of the divine, the power to revoke another person's charter to live on this earth. What we do not understand until it is over is that by unleashing this destructive impulse we destroy not only others but ourselves. War reverberates for years afterward, spinning lives into a dark oblivion of pain and suffering.

Most war films and images meant to denounce war fail. They fail because they impart the thrill of violence and power. War images that show scenes of combat become, despite the intention of those who produce it, war porn. And this is why soldiers who have not been to combat buy cases of beer and sit in front of movies like *Platoon*, movies meant to denounce war, and they yearn for it. It is almost impossible to produce antiwar films or books that portray images of war. It is like trying to produce movies to denounce pornography and showing erotic love scenes. The prurient fascination with violent death overpowers the message.

The best record of war, of what war is and what war does to us, is that which eschews images of combat. This is the power of Griffiths's book. It forces us to see what

the state and the press, the handmaiden of the warmakers, work so hard to keep from us. If we really knew war, what war does to minds and bodies, it would be harder to wage. This is why the essence of war, which is death and suffering, is so carefully hidden from public view. We are not allowed to see dead bodies, at least of our own soldiers, nor do we see the wounds that forever mark lives, the wounds that leave faces and bodies horribly disfigured by burns or shrapnel or poison. War is made palatable. It is sanitized. We are allowed to taste war's perverse thrill, but usually spared from seeing its consequences.

The wounded and the dead are swiftly carted offstage. The maimed are carefully hidden in the wings while the band plays a majestic march.

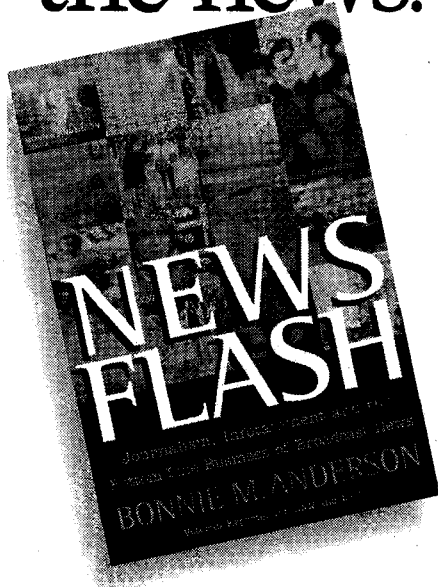
War, at least the mythic version, is wonderful entertainment. We saw this with the war in Iraq, where the press turned it into a video game, with a lot of help from the military, and hid from us the effects of bullets, roadside bombs and rocket-propelled grenades. War is carefully packaged, the way tobacco or liquor companies package their own poisons. We taste a bit of war's exhilaration but are safe, spared the pools of blood, the wailing of a dying child.

Only those works that, like *Agent Orange*, eschew the fascination with violence to give us a look at what war does to human bodies grapple with war's reality. We can only understand war when we turn our attention away from the weapons my father refused to let us see in museums and look at what those weapons do to us, look at those who bear war's burden.

Modern warfare is largely impersonal. It mocks the idea of individual heroism. Industrial warfare, waged since World War I, means that thousands of people, who never see their attackers, can die and suffer in an instant. The power of these industrial weapons, to those of us who have not seen them at work, is incomprehensible. They can take down apartment blocks in seconds, burying everyone inside. They can demolish tanks and planes and ships in fiery blasts. They can leave a country like Vietnam defoliated and poisoned for decades after an afternoon flight.

Those left behind to carry the wounds of war feel, as my uncle did, a sense of abandonment, made all the more painful by the public manifestations of gratitude toward those who fit our image of what war should be. We see only those veterans deemed palatable, those we can look at, those who are willing to go along with the lies of war.

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They are trotted out to perpetuate the myth, held up as heroes for young boys to emulate. We do not tolerate deviations from the script.

My family was not unique. There were tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of families like ours, families that cared for the human refuse of World War II. There are families today that carry similar burdens, from Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War and now Iraq. And there are their counterparts, once the enemy, now part of the suffering mass of humanity that survived the war, brothers and sisters of the maimed.

Agent Orange allows us to look beyond the nationalist cant and flag-waving used to propel us into war. It looks beyond the seduction of the weapons and the pornography of violence. It looks beyond the myth. It focuses on the evil of war.

War corrupts our souls and deforms our bodies. It destroys homes and villages. It grinds into the dirt all that is tender and beautiful and sacred. It is a scourge. It is a plague. Before you agree to wage war, any war, look closely at this book. Look at the faces of these children. Look at the faces of your own children. ■

Native Son

LEELA JACINTO

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING: The First American in Afghanistan.

By Ben Macintyre. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 351 pp. \$25.

At the height of the Great Game, when adventure-crazed young men from Britain and Russia stealthily documented the wild miles and tribes of Central Asia, an American and an Englishman set up temporary residence in the Afghan city of Kabul in the fall of 1837. Educated, enterprising, erudite, the

two *firangis*—Hindi for white men—were both guests of Amir Dost Mohammed Khan, the ruler of large swaths of southern Afghanistan. That's about where the similarities ended. The younger of the two was an official British envoy, a rapidly rising Scotsman whose celebrated, three-part epic about his travels to the Caspian region had turned him into a thinking lady's crummet and the toast of London society. The other was a Pennsylvania-born son of a Quaker merchant, a faux surgeon, spurned lover, itinerant soldier and adventurer exploring the khanates and kingdoms beyond the northwestern outskirts of the British Indian empire.

The Scotsman, Sir Alexander Burnes—or "Bokhara Burnes" as he came to be called—has been the dashing tragic hero of a slew of Great Game chroniclers. For the many writers and historians drawn to the Anglo-Russian rivalry to hustle the "buffer" regions between their expanding empires, Burnes is the quintessential Great Game player, a daring young achiever initially rewarded by the colonial system only to be fatally abandoned by the suits in Calcutta and Westminster. In contrast, Josiah Harlan, the resident American in Kabul, is a shadowy figure, unlisted in most indexes, except for the more exhaustive—and exhausting—ac-

counts, where he merits the briefest of mentions in the also-ran sections.

But now, nearly two centuries after his audacious adventures, British journalist Ben Macintyre rescues Harlan from the maw of obscurity in *The Man Who Would Be King: The First American in Afghanistan*. A thrilling yarn featuring a cast of exotic yet familiar characters—one-eyed maharajahs, razor-sharp British spymasters, horse doctors on mysterious equestrian missions, dastardly princes dangling their bitter plumes in exile, mercenaries of the Napoleonic wars peddling their expertise to local rajahs, wizened *munshis*, or men of learning, dabbling in alchemy and Freemasonry—the book is a Kiplingesque fantasy guaranteed to get even the dourest reader's blood racing. Indeed, as the title suggests, there's more than just a whiff of Rudyard Kipling in this "Asiatic yarn." The bard of the Great Game is widely believed to have fashioned the adventures of Daniel Dravot in *The Man Who Would Be King* (played by Sean Connery in the 1975 John Huston adaptation) on Harlan's almost impossibly exciting life.

Jilted by his fiancée in America, Harlan began his extraordinary travels in Asia as a military surgeon in the British Army in the first Burma War (1824–26) before making his way to the forbidding passes separating the Punjab from the Pashtun tribal heartland. In the course of his hazardous journeys—often in "holy man" drag—Harlan

Leela Jacinto is a New York-based journalist who writes on South Asia and the Middle East.

served as a physician to the mighty Maharajah Ranjit Singh of Punjab and governed a province in the wily Sikh king's extensive kingdom. After an acrimonious falling out with the one-eyed maharajah, Harlan returned to his beloved Kabul, where he took on the role of military adviser to Amir Dost Mohammed. It was under Dost Mohammed's patronage that the American adventurer commandeered a military mission over the perilous Hindu Kush mountains into the Bamian valley. And in the desolate Bamian stretches, where Shiite Hazara tribes lived in perpetual fear of marauding Uzbek warlords, Harlan struck up an extraordinary deal with a local prince. As payment for a proposal to train a tribal army in modern warfare, Harlan secured a promissory document entitling him to rule—as sovereign—the mountainous kingdom of Ghoree, or Ghor.

In 1888, when Kipling wrote *The Man Who Would Be King* while working for the *Pioneer*, a newspaper in northern India, the astute young reporter must certainly have heard tales of the *firangi* who traveled to a godforsaken land and charmed his way to a regal entitlement. In fact, Harlan's life was a far cry from that of Kipling's despotic Dravot, with his fake Masonic rituals, hollering himself hoarse in his attempt to turn his dim-witted subjects "all English"—not like the "common, black Mohammedans." The real-life Harlan displayed scant interest in taking up the white man's burden. A man given to extravagant prose, Harlan was an ardent admirer of Alexander the Great and fancied himself a military heir to the Macedonian conqueror. But his imperial hubris was individualistic and ambitious. While his diaries indulged in florid paeans to Alexander's conquests, in reality he remained an employee of local rulers, adopting their customs and adhering to elaborate Eastern diplomatic protocols.

Early in his travels, he probably supplied information to the British frontier garrison, but he was never employed or acknowledged as a British spy. And toward the end of his journey, Harlan came to detest the grandstanding British imperial mission: In an extraordinary twist in an extraordinary life, the man who began his Asian adventures in the British Army had all but defected to the enemy camp.

The intrigue-rife Great Game saw many ambitious players changing sides and swapping puppet-princes in the pursuit of power. In the end, "Bokhara Burnes," caught in the politicking among London, Calcutta and the outposts of the Empire, found himself switching loyalties in the summer of 1839. Just two

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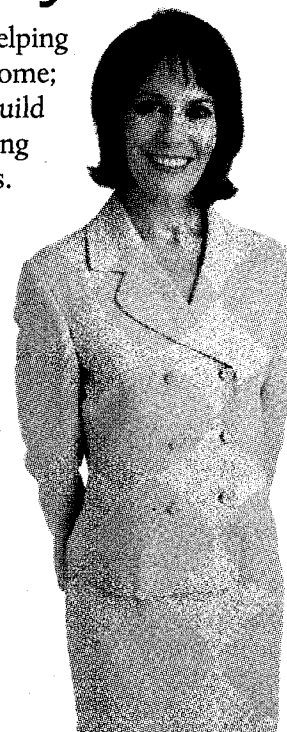
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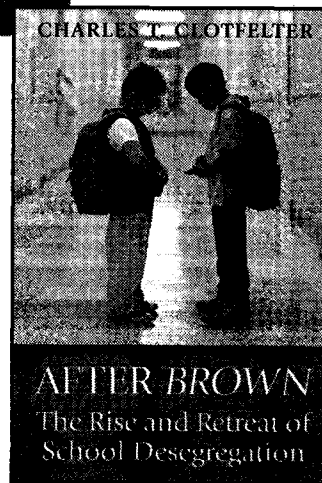
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years after enjoying Dost Mohammed's hospitality in Kabul, Burnes returned to the garden-speckled, mountain-encased Afghan city—only this time, it was with a 15,000-strong British-Indian army intent on toppling his former host and propping up a puppet prince in his place. Despite misgivings about turning on his old Afghan friend, Burnes agreed to lead an advancing expeditionary force into the Afghan heartland. His qualms were quashed by a promotion designed to secure the ambitious young Briton's acquiescence: Just months before "The Army of the Indus" lumbered across the Sindh plains, Burnes was upped to the rank of lieutenant colonel and knighted, at the precocious age of 33.

Harlan, by contrast, proved to be a loyal friend to the end, with a mere Persian promissory document from a Hazara prince to his name. As the Army of the Indus closed in on Kabul, the American adventurer joined the fast-dwindling ranks of faithful advisers in Dost Mohammed's tent. His account of the Dost's last dignified moments in Kabul, even as looters tried to grab the pillows and carpets beneath the once mighty ruler's feet, is a wrenching account of the East being humiliated and crushed by the conquering West.

The British did capture Kabul and place the craven Shah Shujah on the throne. They also proceeded to fashion a mini-Calcutta out of Kabul, bringing up their wives (the detestable *memsahibs* of British India), throwing tea and dinner parties where the champagne and sherry flowed, playing polo and cricket and pretending Afghanistan was an outpost of India. In a dispatch that came to epitomize the white man's colonial delusions, the British administrator in Afghanistan famously reported that all was quiet "from Dan to Beersheba."

Within months, the British residency in Kabul was in flames and an enraged crowd had surrounded Burnes's residence and savagely ripped the young Scotsman to shreds. The once proud Army of the Indus, which had ridden into Kabul with camels bearing cargo of crockery and cutlery, was hissed and hacked out of Afghanistan. And in one of the more melodramatic moments of British colonial history, only a lone horseman, a military surgeon with his skull severely gashed, managed to straggle to the safety of the Jalalabad garrison.

Routed out of Afghanistan and unhappily back in America by then, Harlan launched a scathing attack on the British enterprise in his beloved Afghanistan. The British had inflicted "famines, discontent, disaffection" and "financial distress" in

their colonies, he thundered in his book, *A Memoir of India and Avghanistaun*. Through "frivolity, stupidity and turpitude," he wrote, Burnes had brought about "the massacre of a British army and the destruction of many a noble soldier." The response to his *Memoir* will sound familiar to any American accused of being "unpatriotic" for opposing the latest Iraq war. For British readers horrified and shocked by their army's sacking in the East—the English newspaper reports had described

The first American in Afghanistan had little in common with today's US soldiers, in their wraparound sunglasses and bulletproof vests.

happy locals welcoming the British "civilizing mission"—Harlan's vituperation proved too much. An "extraordinary concoction of bombastic romance, deliberate perversions, false statements and virulent abuse," sneered one British critic. His arguments were summarily rejected, and some writers took vicious personal jabs, such as the influential English military historian Sir John William Kaye, who called Harlan "clever and unscrupulous."

Almost overnight, Harlan turned into a "publishing pariah" as Macintyre aptly puts it. Not only would publishers never touch his subsequent writings but the British establishment also succeeded in closing ranks and officially discounting or dismissing the American's achievements in their part of the world. In the 1920s British historian Charles Grey savaged the American adventurer as an unhinged embellisher at best, a liar at worst. As happens all too depressingly often, subsequent historians took their cue from the early-twentieth-century historians—if they even bothered with the first American in Afghanistan.

As an Indian child devouring Great Game accounts by British historians, I could never quite suppress my glee over the sacking of the British garrison and the shredding of a colonial hero in Kabul. Gandhian nonviolent struggle was all very well, but a little bloodshed for such colossal imperial hubris couldn't hurt that much, could it?

Well, not if you've been sampling the Great Game fare out there. The most vivid writers tend to stem from the center-right, from the unapologetically imperialist Kipling to the slavishly Raj-nostalgic Peter Hopkirk. The more fair-minded breed of chroniclers, who have benefited from newly released Russian documents after the Soviet collapse, do provide a less Anglophile version of history. Alas, their

work also tends to be heavy going—such as the exemplarily researched *Tournament of Shadows* by Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac.

In a sort of transatlantic making of amends for the shoddy literary treatment his countrymen meted out to the American adventurer, Macintyre has uncovered a trove of documents and Harlan's own unpublished journals to produce an honest retelling of the American Quaker's Afghan adventures. If there's one little problem with *The Man Who Would Be King*, it's Macintyre's penchant for drawing facile parallels between the first American in Afghanistan and the subsequent American inter-

ventions during the cold war and after September 11. A seasoned former foreign correspondent and columnist for the *London Times*, Macintyre says he became interested in Harlan's story in the lead-up to the October 2001 attack, when US bunker-buster bombs were blasting the Tora Bora caves targeting Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters. But apart from their nationality, there's very little in common between Josiah Harlan, multilinguist, naturalist, observer, scholar and writer, and US Special Forces teams in their wraparound sunglasses and bulletproof vests, at the mercy of their translators and at risk of stomping into local vendettas. Whereas Harlan loved the land and its people and mastered their languages and customs, the new breed of Americans in Afghanistan, for the most part, can't wait to get home. Where US troops in Afghanistan fashion mini-Americas in their bases, complete with videos, Super Bowl and Oscar Night broadcasts, and the annual Thanksgiving turkey, Harlan, the consummate nineteenth-century man of letters, extensively recorded the minutiae of native life, from studies of dromedaries to military tactics to tribal folkways.

Harlan may have unfurled the American Stars and Stripes on the Hazara heights, and he may have secured a promissory note to rule a kingdom, but he never did become king. He was a man cut off from his newly formed homeland, which in turn was too busy defining itself and pushing West to care about what was happening in the East. As a born-again anticolonialist, Harlan was in fact precursor to a rather different breed of American—now seemingly silenced—who supported anticolonial movements in the former colonies.

Kipling may have exhorted the United States to "take up the white man's burden" in the Philippines in 1899, but even the imperial bard was honest about its reception.

For it is in death that the *firangis* who have hustled the East face the consequences of their deeds. Dravot was beheaded in Kipling's Kafiristan, his mottled, matted head smuggled out of hostile terrain in a loyal companion's hairskin bag. Burnes, Harlan's former neighbor in Kabul, met his

gruesome end at the hands of a rampaging mob. For Harlan, the man who would have been king but in reality only served kings, it was a secure—if obscure—old age and death in America. One can only hope that the current crop of empire-shapers in the East will have quite the same luck. ■

All in the Family?

STANLEY ARONOWITZ

THE PECKING ORDER: Which Siblings Succeed and Why.

By Dalton Conley. Pantheon. 309 pp. \$24.

Despite decades of battering by divorce and the proliferation of single-parent households, the family remains a source of inexhaustible fascination. The topic is of obsessive, often prurient interest, permeating every genre of popular culture, from the endless stream of sitcoms featuring a mildly troubled or outright dysfunctional household, to pop psychology and crime journalism plumbing the depths of the family romance to account for murder and mayhem (not to mention the guilty pleasure many of us have taken in following the differential fortunes of Jimmy and Billy Carter and Bill and Roger Clinton; the tragic but fascinating Kennedy family history; and, of course, the rise of George W. Bush—the least likely to succeed of Barbara and George Senior's kids—who overcame mediocre school grades, multiple business failures, alcoholism, verbal incoherence and popular electoral defeat to become President of the United States). We've gotten used to blaming parents for the waywardness of their children, when we don't blame the children themselves. In these stories the family is the place-keeper for society because it is the institution that remains closest to us.

Now comes Dalton Conley's effort to explain why siblings often end up on opposite sides of the class divide despite being raised in the same family. *The Pecking Order* is a fun read with a serious intent—both a study of the family and a symptom of our fascination with it. Conley, a New York University sociologist in his 30s, satisfies our thirst for knowing the private lives of the rich and famous while also shedding light on the family lives of anonymous Americans. Perhaps more to the point, his book feeds our need for reassurance by reciting the familiar narrative of

social mobility in America: In nearly all of Conley's anecdotes, some unlikely sibling defies the social determinism of birth. Thus Bill Clinton's rise to fame and power is an inadvertent re-enactment of that paradigmatic American success story, Abe Lincoln's mythic overcoming of seemingly insuperable odds. Bill's early life was marked by an absent biological father and a "bitterly jealous" stepfather who was abusive to his mother. How did Bill escape the murky fortunes of his brother, Roger, who seemed to succumb to the effects of their shared grim home life? Conley suggests that given the family's severely restricted resources it was a zero-sum game; Bill's gain was Roger's loss.

The majority of Conley's examples, however, are drawn from the lives of ordinary Americans, and he relates their stories with a novelist's flair. (To his credit, he relegated the inevitable essay on method to a lengthy appendix, thus preserving the book's narrative flow.) In these accounts he seeks to challenge the two most popular explanations for success: "It's all in the genes," and the equally determinist attribution of failure to social conditions, particularly social class. Inequality, Conley argues, cuts broadly across the class and occupational structure and begins at home; the way parents relate to their children greatly influences their chance of achieving success and social prestige outside the home. According to Conley, families set up a "pecking order" in which parents often lavish attention on one child while ignoring or giving short shrift to the others. Although he does not ignore the role the larger social structure plays in holding many kids back both

Stanley Aronowitz is distinguished professor of sociology at CUNY Graduate Center. His latest book is *How Class Works* (Yale).

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from academic achievement and from social mobility, Conley places most of his emphasis on such factors as birth order—whether the older sibling has a chance to experience her or his early years as an only child, thus receiving, for a time, all of the parents' attention; whether the middle child gets neglected; or whether the youngest are born far enough down the line so that their siblings have left the house and they are the beneficiaries of an unusual outpouring of parental love and support.

Conley concedes that about half of social and economic inequality in America (greater than in any other developed society) is due to "external" factors beyond the control of the family. But only toward the end of his book does he give serious attention to structural obstacles to mobility such as class and its consequences. Whatever influence birth order and parental attitudes may have, kids born in working-class families seldom become professionals and managers, let alone business owners. Poor and working-class children tend to be raised in homes with few books or other forms of cultural capital, a disadvantage the underfunded schools they attend can hardly begin to remedy. Many of these children hardly see their parents, who are either working two jobs or looking for work, and they suffer from higher rates of parental abuse (especially by fathers or stepfathers) than their middle-class peers. As if that weren't enough, they are also more likely to be raised by one parent—not to mention those who have been raised in foster homes. By stressing the pecking order over larger socioeconomic forces, Conley takes a fairly ahistorical slice of the larger reality. At the turn of the twenty-first century, when even professionals and managers face job insecurity and education only gets you through the door but not necessarily to a job, the statistic that the pecking order accounts for half of social inequality reflects a situation that is rapidly passing into history.

The most serious problem with *The Pecking Order* is not the finding that families matter in determining the fate of their offspring. For a limited group of families Conley makes his case. The main problem is his conceptual framework for understanding success and failure, class, social mobility and, indeed, education. Conley's measure of "success" is whether the child, from whatever socioeconomic background, becomes a member of the professional/managerial class. People who end up becoming factory workers, truck drivers or ordinary clerical workers are, tacitly, viewed as failures. And Conley offers almost no concept of class other than that which is common among social scientists.

Class, for him, is determined by occupation and income. Missing from this analysis is economic power—over ownership of productive property or, conversely, the power acquired by "low" status groups who form unions or other groups to acquire power in order to advance their interests.

Conley seems to have little awareness of or interest in what for many working people is an enviable form of success: holding a high-seniority union factory job or becoming a union driver, a skilled construction worker or a machinist. Achievement in school has little to do with this kind of success. For example, to qualify for an apprenticeship in the electrical or plumbers union, all you need is a high school diploma. Truck drivers are among the highest paid of nonprofessionals; their income exceeds that of many "professionals." Yet they require only a short course and a road test to qualify for the job.

Most of us first acquire our understanding of class from our family, and Conley—the son of artists who raised him and his younger sister in a poor, largely black urban neighborhood—is no exception. In an engaging confession titled "Lies My Mother Told Me," he writes of his "intense sibling rivalry," in which he was the privileged child. I suspect that he has taken his own autobiography as a model for success, and his own position in the family as a social indicator. Of course, this may apply to families with middle-class cultural advantages or aspirations, but that is not Conley's claim. His intention is to describe an important aspect of social inequality.

This sort of disclosure has become almost obligatory, ever since Pierre Bourdieu insisted that social scientists be self-reflexive. Allow me, then, to offer my own. I am the only child of two parents, both of whom engaged in steady clerical and technical work throughout my childhood. Still, I did well enough in school to gain entrance to Brooklyn College, then a tuition-free public institution, before dropping out to work as a laborer in steel-fabricating and machine-parts plants for the next ten years. As a union activist and factory worker, I met many people who had absolutely no desire for "social mobility" and a number whose dream was to own a bar or a grocery store, not, say, to run a corporation. Some rose to shop-floor or local union leadership and others were active in the church, social clubs or veterans organizations. Mostly they were intelligent, critical and often creative people on the job and off the shop floor, and hardly any experienced their lives as failures. When I became a union organizer in the clothing and oil industries, I

found that few workers expressed a sense of defeat or disappointment that, as Brando puts it in the film *On the Waterfront*, they "coulda been a contender." In many instances they felt their (male) children would do well to get a job in the mill.

The Pecking Order also takes a rather uncritical and ahistorical view of the fate of the professions in America. Some professions have always been unstable, especially those in the theater, music and entertainment industry. Aside from a handful of stars, most musicians, writers and actors struggle to scrape together a living as freelancers; the few who are lucky enough to obtain steady work usually earn decent but unremarkable pay. What is fairly new is that tens of thousands of highly educated computer technologists, professors and scientists have been forced to take part-time, contingent and temporary employment to get by. And since 2000 the rash of layoffs because of outsourcing and, most crucially, job-destroying technological change has left many highly qualified managers and professionals unemployed, especially older workers. Against this backdrop of vanishing social mobility in America, it's hard to see what difference the pecking order actually makes. Equally significant, one of the crucial advantages of professional status, the ability to control one's time and make independent decisions, has been eroded by the incorporation of the professions into salaried labor.

Even the so-called salaried professions have ceased to be guarantees of social mobility. Once an independent entrepreneur, the salaried physician or engineer—now characteristic of the medical, engineering and legal professions—has been reduced to a well-paid worker with a huge education debt. Recent trends in corporate life, including healthcare institutions, have stripped these professionals of their most prized possession, autonomy. Increasingly subject to strict supervision, doctors have little discretion in prescribing treatment regimes, which has prompted some to organize into trade unions. Engineers, for their part, complain of speedup, the cause of a celebrated strike of 16,000 Boeing engineers in 2000. But since the United States no longer holds a near monopoly in technical knowledge, many of these jobs are migrating, along with clothing and textile jobs, to China and India, where graduate engineers and computer specialists earn a fifth of their American counterparts. Computerization and other job-destroying technologies signal the death of middle management as well.

To study the relationship between family structures and the emerging labor-

market structures requires more than what conventional sociological categories are able to capture. What Conley has given us is a snapshot of the opportunities that were available to some working people during a unique period of American history: the compressed epoch of the industrializing era that began in the middle of the nineteenth century and ended in the mid-1970s, when it was possible for about a quarter of the population to beat the odds and rise above class and occupational conditions of birth. The reason for their "success" was that the economy needed scarce qualified labor and established the educational and training institutions to supply it, since schools were joined at the hip to the economy. But the economy periodically tends to overproduce commodities, and schools were no exception. By the 1970s economic growth slowed to a crawl and,

with some exceptions, notably computer science and technology, there appeared to be a glut of qualified, highly educated labor. As early as the 1980s the media and economists were warning of "the downsizing of America" in the wake of globalization, technological displacement and slow growth. Downsizing, which began with factory and clerical labor, soon spread to salaried professionals with advanced degrees. Since the 1970s the world of work has been turned upside down. Even Dalton Conley's generation, let alone younger and older people, can no longer expect that educational achievement and other privileges of those situated favorably within the pecking order will translate into social mobility. For the brutal truth is that the blue-collar blues have reached the ambitious and the striving. And there is no end in sight. ■

Happy 30th Anniversary Discovery/*The Nation*

The *Nation* is proud to announce the 30th Anniversary Reading of Discovery/*The Nation*. The annual contest, for poets whose work has not been published in book form, was founded by *Nation* poetry editor Grace Schulman as a fusion of *The Nation*'s Poetry Prize and the 92nd Street Y Poetry Center's Discovery Award. The winners for 2004 are James Arthur, Hailey Leithauser, Mitch Roberson and Anne Pierson Wiese. This year's judges are Richard Kenney, Brad Leithauser and Rachel Wetzsteon. As in the past, manuscripts are judged anonymously. Distinguished former winners of Discovery/*The Nation* include Susan Mitchell, Katha Pollitt, Mary Jo Salter, Sherod Santos, Arthur Smith, Emily Heistand, Debora Greger, Roseanna Warren and David St. John. Past judges include Yehuda Amichai, James Merrill, Anthony Hecht, Mark Strand, Louise Glück, Michael Harper and Audre Lorde. This year's Discovery/*The Nation* event, featuring readings by the four winners, is scheduled for 8:15 on Monday, May 10, The Unterberg Poetry Center, 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Avenue.

BLINDNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

I can't say. Is it better to close your eyes,
or to go unseen?

Better to live unlit and ostrich-like
(a beached, unlikely survivor, the burier of an unhatched head), or

as a ctenophore, invisible in the ocean's indifferent embrace,
as a glassy swimmer never seen by the sun?

Hot heart, transparent body,

done or undone, we'll grow in
each other's eyes—

James Arthur

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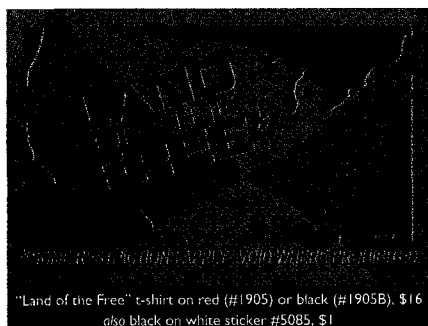


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THE RETURN OF OZYMANDIAS

By Honor, what mess
they made of me! Sand

and scorch, ruin and
wind. Man is an ass

we know, but know this
also: That which stands

a day in sun stands
forever. What use

is there in ageless
glory? What command

speaks beyond our end?
I triumphed. No less

now my splendor pass,
did I once ascend.

Hailey Leithauser

D'AGOSTINO

No clouds, but over the graduated hillsides
of produce, thunder and lightning warn
that automatic rain is about to fall
on peppers, on mealy, out-of-season tomatoes,

tumescent cucumbers, rain-hatted heads of iceberg
lettuce. Perhaps the thunder and lightning
are as mythic to the vegetables as they are to us,
reminding the asparagus and snap-peas, the organic

and inorganic broccoli, of the California fields
they sprouted in, awakening them
from the nightmare of being harvested and hauled
cross-country, into the dawn of fluorescent

day. Neither are we deprived of the effects of false
weather. Outside there is grass painted green
to make it appear more grass-like, car-capsules
with individual climate control for each passenger,

malls that are little towns that replace little towns.
But how can any weather be false? The humidity
of the Muzak isn't false, nor is the fog
that vanishes when you close the frozen doors

to the chopped spinach's temple of ice. In these aisles
that are the bushes from which we pick nuts and berries
to bring back to our young, the air conditioning
compels us to buy more and more. Isn't weather

no matter how conditioned, still weather? Nature
still nature? See—there's a bird flying from one rafter
to the next, alighting as if on a limb, confused
by how low the sky is today, how ripe the pickings.

Mitch Roberson

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THE CENTURY PLANT

The century plant's flowered spear appears only once, twenty feet tall, shortly before its death. Given the proper conditions, all plants bloom on schedule. We are less sure of ourselves, the conditions we make for presenting what's inside us to the world less specific; we are haunted by unplantlike doubts about the worth of what we have to offer. The Botanic Garden had advertised the event. I don't remember how old I was, maybe ten. There was a once-in-a-lifetime line in the conservatory, a familiar smell of growth and decay, the choice to look or look away.

Anne Pierson Wiese

FILMS

Broadcast News

STUART KLAWANS

THE AGRONOMIST • SUPER SIZE ME • SINCE OTAR LEFT...

Most faces can simply be described, but some (like Jean Dominique's) need explaining. When did the lips shrink away, and the light brown skin start clinging to the bones? Maybe it happened during his prison term in the 1950s, when the young Dominique got in trouble for helping Haitian peasants

improve their crops. Six months of Papa Doc Duvalier's hospitality might give any man that death's-head look. But then, how did the death's head grow such strong, wide upper teeth? They make Dominique's frequent smiles look like flashes of a guillotine blade, as if his student years in France had taught him the retributive use of wit. France taught him a love of film, too—he founded Haiti's first cinema club, in the early 1960s, and encouraged the development of indigenous film production—which may help account for his actorly exuberance. He comically scrunches his long, sharp nose, to show he's sniffing the winds of change. He lifts his chin and demonstrates a dry, ironic *kreyòl* hum, then adds, "That 'mm-hmm' has three Macoutes in it."

For some thirty years, as the owner, director and leading voice of Radio Haiti, Jean Dominique used his theatricality, wit, eloquence and anger to inform and inspire Haiti's poor. "Risky business," as he says more than once, shaking his head, in Jonathan Demme's first-rate documentary *The Agronomist*. The fallout from those risks

(which included two periods in exile) goes a long way toward explaining how Dominique got that fleshless face, and why it holds your eyes like Zurbarán's *St. Francis*. You understand why he looked cadaverous long before April 3, 2000, when an assassin cut him down.

Demme began interviewing Dominique in New York City in 1993, during his second exile. (Among the ironies that brought out the guillotine smile: The United States both put him to flight and gave him refuge.) Demme went on to conduct interviews in Haiti with Michèle Montas (Dominique's wife and radio partner) and others in their circle, record key events (including, ultimately, the funeral) and assemble footage from many sources and periods, going back to the 1930s. So you can watch *The Agronomist* as a unified work, which brings together a dozen years of Demme's filmmaking, or, just as well, as one result among several from his long-running engagement with the Haitian people. I prefer the latter view. It fits better with the ongoingness of the film, which seems to come (thanks to

Demme's finesse) straight from the spirit of Dominique and Montas themselves.

This isn't to deny that Demme has shaped the documentary, and even rounded it. The film begins and ends with the sound of Dominique's cutting, mocking voice, as he gives the station identification for Radio Haiti. A sense of loss hovers over these moments: The first images are of the studio, with Dominique gone, while the last are of the countryside he'd come from, and of a photograph of the smooth-faced boy he'd once been. In between these absences, though, the film is full, with Demme piecing together a narrative that expertly combines the lives of Dominique and Montas with the political history of Haiti from the 1930s until now. Some pieces of information are irresistibly strange—for example, the fact that Montas is a former homecoming queen of the University of Maine; and others (details of the US role in Haiti) prove to be distressingly familiar, once Demme usefully refreshes your memory of them. Throughout, Demme does an exemplary job: never burdening the story (except possibly with the soundtrack music), never editorializing on his own behalf and never interfering with the personalities of his two main subjects.

Why would he have interfered? In their courage, strength, intelligence and humor, Dominique and Montas would be gifts to any filmmaker—and never more so than in the stunning sequence toward the end, when Montas broadcasts from Radio Haiti for the first time since her husband's death. She spins out an allegory for her listeners, telling them that Dominique's opponents are fools if they think they've killed him, since he was known to have carried an invisibility powder and has been spotted just recently in the country, dressed in that unmistakable black leather cap, packing tobacco into his pipe with that characteristic gesture. "Bonjour, Jean," she says into the microphone, concluding a heart-stopping performance—at which point, Demme cuts to footage of Dominique driving through Port-au-Prince, as if he really were still alive, and still talking in a brilliant performance of his own.

There are many good things to say about *The Agronomist*—but the best is that it plays as if Dominique and Montas were the authors.

Compare Dominique, if you will, with the much discussed *Super Size Me*. The Haitian is brilliant, fiery and spare. The Americans (most of them) are uninformed, vague and very, very fat. The bloating is so awful, in fact, that you might be tempted to imagine it as a self-inflicted

curse—as if, by siphoning off another people's liberty and sustenance, the Americans had sucked up their flesh, too.

I suspect such cartoonish irony would have seemed too simple to Dominique. I know it's too easy for Spurlock, who devotes *Super Size Me* to debunking this very notion of obesity as the failing of a morally slack nation. The subject of his documentary is the American food industry, which increases its profits and political influence, he argues, by relentlessly pushing products that are unhealthy, addictive and packaged in absurdly large portions. The primary target of his attack is the McDonald's corporation: the most ubiquitous arm of the industry, and the one that is perhaps most successful at pulling in children. His method is self-sacrifice. For the entire month of February 2003, Spurlock ate nothing but McDonald's food, three meals a day. *Super Size Me* is the story of how the company did just that.

A muckraking performance polemic—part of it in the Upton Sinclair tradition, and part in the more recent mold of Michael Moore—*Super Size Me* takes as its starting point the recent, widely derided lawsuit filed on behalf of two adolescent girls, who wanted McDonald's to pay damages for making them fat. The common-sense reply to their complaint was that no one had forced them to eat at McDonald's, or to eat so much. Spurlock's rejoinder is that these girls were born into a world with powerful institutions, economic relationships and tools of persuasion, all of which are currently focused on getting that Big Mac down a kid's throat, followed by half a pound of fries and thirty-two ounces of caffeinated sugar water. To make the case, Spurlock brings his camera into school cafeterias that have been taken over, very lucratively, by the fast-food business, so that students routinely eat a lunch of fried sweets. He interviews a lively group of first graders, all of whom can recognize the face of Ronald McDonald but are stumped when shown a picture of Jesus. He talks with nutritionists at New York University about the addictive properties of fast food, and shows you memorable footage of the gastric bypass procedure undergone by one Bruce Howlett, whose soda-pop habit came close to costing him his life.

But enough of that. You want to know about Spurlock, and what happened to him after twenty-eight days of choking down Egg McMuffins and Chicken McNuggets. A tall, athletic man in his 30s, with receding ginger hair and an inverted U of a mustache, Spurlock started the month with a weight of 185 pounds and a serum cholesterol level of 168 and finished weighing

210, with a cholesterol reading of 230. And that's not the worst. One of the three physicians who monitored him during the experiment, Dr. Daryl Isaacs, pleaded with him on the twenty-first day to stop, since his blood work showed he was doing the sort of damage that alcoholics inflict on themselves on a binge. "The results for your liver," Isaacs said, "are obscene beyond anything I would have thought." Looking on appalled, and offering comic relief, is Spurlock's girlfriend, Alexandra Jamieson, who makes her living as a vegan chef.

Spurlock, for his part, makes a living as a producer and director of commercials and music videos, a trade that contributes to the zippy, wise-guy tone of this first feature-length film. His image-making is so versatile that it can almost seem scattershot; his on-screen persona so cocky that you may be glad when he turns wan with triglycerides, since then he backs off for a minute. His method of argument sometimes veers dangerously toward the associative, and his picture quality reminds you that video-to-film transfer has not yet been perfected.

And so what? Spurlock has made something challenging and new out of the American love of excess. He has turned our appetites into a tool of political education. Maybe you cringe at that last phrase; I often do. But I know I laughed and shuddered at the gross-out comedy of *Super Size Me* and then found myself discussing it compulsively, starting at home.

Where had I been, my 5-year-old asked. When I explained, he shouted angrily, "Daddy, that movie doesn't know what it's talking about! McDonald's is the healthiest food there is!"

Julie Bertuccelli's first feature, *Since Otis Left...*, is so beautifully sustained in mood, so finely balanced in acting and storytelling, that I'm almost afraid to add words to the experience. The film puts me in mind of a snowflake, which will be destroyed the moment you touch it. Then again, this snowflake may be tougher than average, since it's Georgian. Let me risk this much:

In a small, book-crammed apartment in Tbilisi live three generations of women: the diminutively imperious grandmother, Eka (Esther Gorintin), the perpetually exasperated, middle-aged daughter, Marina (Nino Khomassouridze) and sweet-faced, studious young Ada (Dinara Droukarova), who like so many grandchildren skips a generation in her familial allegiance. Communication is tenuous. Marina counters Eka's television by turning on the radio, which prompts Ada to play a cassette tape at high volume. Peace returns only with the



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latest of Tbilisi's frequent power outages, or when a telephone call comes from Paris. There, Eka's deeply beloved son Otar has been living as an undocumented construction worker, which gives him a better life than he'd have as a medical doctor in post-Soviet Georgia.

When Otar dies in an accident, Marina and Ada clash over whether to tell Eka, then take up a prolonged deception, with young Ada using her expertise in French to fake a series of letters. Of course, this is not the only form of lying that goes on in Tbilisi, nor the only misuse of skill and knowledge. What ensues is a dry-eyed comedy of disillusionment, perfect in plot and tone, with the amazing 90-year-old Esther Gorintin dominating a trio of marvelous performances. *Since Otar Left...* is not to be missed. ■

EVENTS

NATIONAL

URPE Summer Conference

■ Right-wing Coup, or Neoliberalism as Usual? Friday, June 4—Monday, June 7. Camp Chinqueka, Bantam, CT. Plenaries include: "Neoliberalism at Home—Right-Wing Escalation?" with Nomi Prins and Doug Henwood; "Global Neoliberalism—Is It Different Under Bush & Post-9/11?" with Ilene Grabel, Gerard Dumenil and Greg Wilpert; "Resistance to Neoliberal Capitalism," with Cyndi Milstein, Mike McGuire and Ashanti Alston; and the David Gordon Lecture: "Communicating Political Economy," by Ann Markusen. Camp Chinqueka, located in the mountains of northwestern Connecticut, provides opportunities for swimming, boating, tennis, basketball, soccer, volleyball and hiking. Children are welcome. Rates: sliding scale. For more information contact URPE at urpe@labornet.org or (413) 577-0806. Visit our website: www.urpe.org.

NEW YORK

Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

■ Join us for the 68th reunion of the Lincoln Brigade, Sunday, May 2, 1:30 PM at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts (60 Washington Square South). Featuring *Nation* publisher Victor Navasky, emcee Henry Foner and the musical revue "Patriots Act!" with Barbara Dane and the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Tickets: (212) 674-5552.

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INTERESTED IN JOINING THE HOUSTON NATION DISCUSSION group? Contact Charles Mauch at (713) 524-2492 or e-mail chasmauch@aol.com.

MONTPELIER, VT, NATION DISCUSSION GROUP is meeting. For information call (802) 229-9918 or e-mail lnichol@together.net.

GIG HARBOR, WA, NATION DISCUSSION GROUP is seeking new members. Call Bill Nerin (253) 851-8888 or e-mail nerins@earthlink.net.

SOUTHERN VERMONT NATION DISCUSSION GROUP is forming, centered in Wilmington and the surrounding towns of Marlboro, Halifax, Whitingham, Readsboro, Woodford and West Dover, but all interested persons from the Brattleboro, Greenfield and Bennington areas invited to join. For information please call Bob Silverman, (802) 464-5149.

MONTCLAIR, NJ, NATION DISCUSSION GROUP is meeting. For further information call Char or Mark at (973) 220-6142; or e-mail CharlotteEulette@aol.com.

PLEASANTON/LIVERMORE/DUBLIN, CA, area Nation discussion group forming. Call John at (925) 462-6815 or e-mail supervalue10@aol.com.

THE NATION DISCUSSION GROUP of the Inland Northwest is forming in the Cheney/Spokane area of eastern Washington. For information contact Gil Murray. Tel: (509) 235-1574; e-mail murraygil@aol.com.

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AKRON/KENT, OHIO NATION DISCUSSION GROUP FORMING. Please contact Pam by e-mail at questionaskwhy@yahoo.com or call (330) 298-9576. Will meet the second Thursday of every month from 7-9 PM.

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DENTON, TX, NATION DISCUSSION GROUP is forming. Contact John at (940) 498-4486 for more information.

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ORGANIZATIONS

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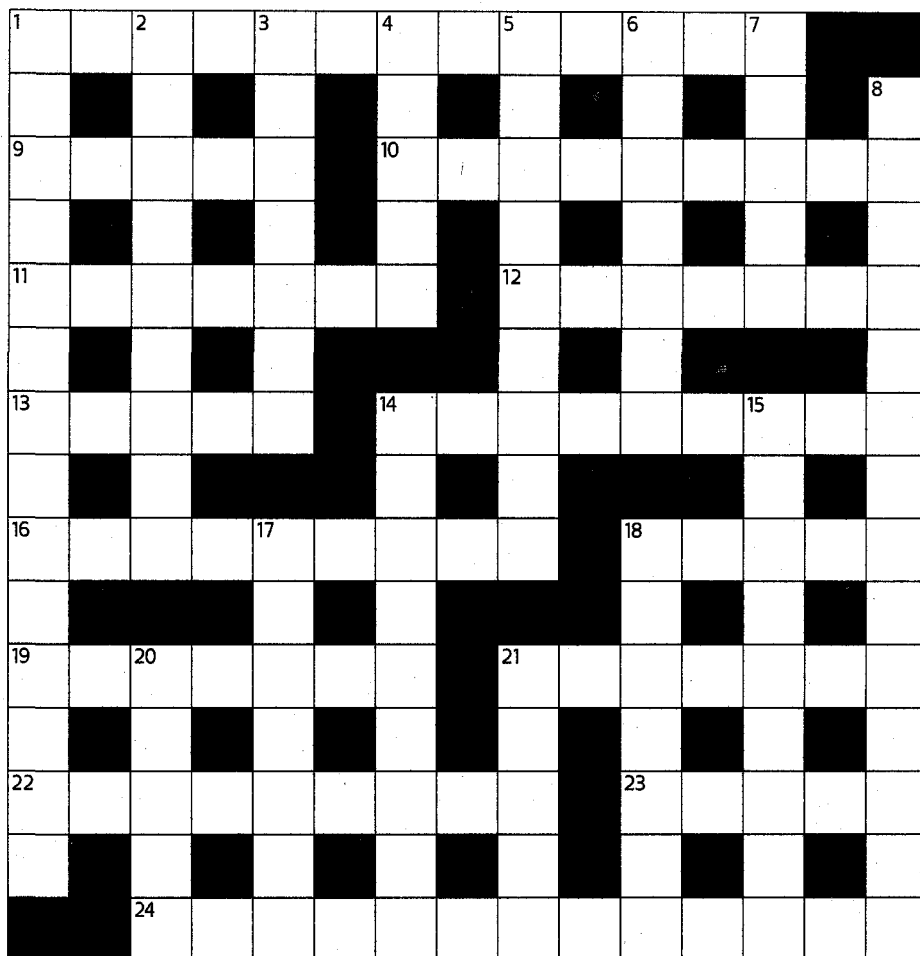
FRANK W. LEWIS

ACROSS

- 1 Soak an old vessel, and notice outfit there—you usually see that your mail has it. (6,7)
- 9 Evidently places where one might expect farmers to have wives, children, etc. (5)
- 10 Not a good result ordered in a very loud way, etc., sort of! (3,6)
- 11 Beginning to develop what might be the absence of smell, for Jock. (7)
- 12 Unable even in the old days to find a place where you should be able to get a drink. (7)
- 13 Those tricky practices of society! (5)
- 14 A supposedly funny man whose laughter was mixed with tears. (9)
- 16 Concerning a couple, the human species collectively should be able to fix things up around the house. (9)
- 18 Part of a person's language, obviously—thrown in a nonstandard way. (5)
- 19 One classically has his chin in his hand, and a very skinny beginning of a scarf. (7)
- 21 The law has a bit of coded info on a western Indian. (7)
- 22 Lack of knowledge certainly creates a nice scene, surprisingly! (9)
- 23 You might get to pen it, being rather awkward. (5)
- 24 The opposite of a striking success, caused by the red light not working. (6,7)

DOWN

- 1 Is the Communist getting mixed up with the rest of society, re-establishing this? (14)
- 2 Insists on telling you all about the day's work, with a little speech getting the ship to jump up and down. (5,4)
- 3 Those that crow lose nothing, since they tell whose duty it is. (7)
- 4 If you're at IBM, you'll prove it's the very limit! (5)
- 5 You can find a dozen angles with one, but it makes the coed go and become really different. (9)



- 6 A broken fife is about the last thing you might call one in a foreign land! (7)
- 7 One might be responsible for the strain of kitchen duty. (5)
- 8 A little way on, two gin slings snare T.E. Lawrence, intially eccentric—and painful in the field! (8,6)
- 14 Where that cute little dog came from, according to a bad poem, and went on with a first-class upbringing. (9)
- 15 The low register of a clarinet, which made a close friend around Mr. Gore take to the water, as the French say. (9)
- 17 A small perception of what comes from the cuttlefish and another sea creature. (7)
- 18 It comes out in the wash, having 50 with one on either side, but you probably wouldn't speak of it this way. (7)

- 20 Where Alexander fought in Phrygia gives one afterthought to you and me. (5)
- 21 One doesn't like to be put on it, even in the flesh, improperly. (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2940

H	E	A	V	I	S	I	D	E	L	A	Y	E	R
Y	M	N	D	L	B	A	A						
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	O	R	E	S	T	E	S
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